

Pregledni znanstveni članek/Article (1.02)

Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly 85 (2025) 2, 385—398

Besedilo prejeto/Received:06/2024; sprejeto/Accepted:09/2025

UDK/UDC: 27-46-053.6(4)

DOI: 10.34291/BV2025/02/Przygoda

© 2025 Przygoda, CC BY 4.0

Wiesław Przygoda

Youth Ministry Renewal Guidelines in the Context of the Process of Secularisation in Europe

Smernice za obnovo mladinske pastorale v kontekstu procesa sekularizacije v Evropi

Abstract: Secularisation, coupled with the forces of globalisation, cultural revolution, individualism, subjectivism, moral relativism, and the pervasive impact of modern information and communication technologies, continues to exert significant influence on the religious landscape, particularly among the younger generation in Euro-Atlantic civilisation. This article initially presents a synthetic characterisation of the religiosity of contemporary youth in Europe. The main purpose of our inquiry is the exploration of potentials for revitalising youth pastoral care, which must grapple with the influence of secularisation and its detrimental impact on Christian faith. Our investigation hinges on the following elements proposed for the renewal of youth pastoral care: a) revival of (pre-)evangelisation; b) active participation in building the Church community; c) fostering social involvement through engagement in the Church's apostolate; and d) adopting new language and communication forms that resonate with the contemporary youth. To conduct this pastoral-theological analysis, we draw upon the findings of social research on the religiosity of youth, correlating these insights with the current teachings of the Catholic Church. Additionally, we integrate emerging ideas from the public discourse aimed at enhancing youth pastoral care. The ultimate objective is to provide actionable insights for developing an effective response to the challenges posed by secularisation, thereby nurturing and preserving the Christian faith among the younger generation.

Keywords: secularisation, youth, youth ministry, evangelisation, social apostolate

Povzetek: Sekularizacija – skupaj s silami globalizacije, kulturne revolucije, individualizma, subjektivizma, moralnega relativizma ter vseprisotnega vpliva sodobnih informacijskih in komunikacijskih tehnologij – vseskozi pomembno vpliva na versko krajino, zlasti med mlajšo generacijo v zahodni civilizaciji. Prispevek v uvodu povzema bistvene značilnosti religioznosti pri sodobni evropski mladini. Glavni namen je raziskovanje potencialov za ožvitev pastorale mladih, ki naj se spopade z vplivom sekularizacije in njenim neugodnim vplivom na krščansko vero. Raziskava se osredotoča na naslednje elemente, ki jih predlagamo za ob-

novo pastorale mladih: a) oživitve (pred)evangelizacije; b) aktivno sodelovanje pri gradnji cerkvene skupnosti; c) spodbujanje družbene vključenosti z vključevanjem v apostolat Cerkev; d) sprejemanje novih jezikovnih in komunikacijskih oblik, ki nagovarjajo sodobno mladino. Za izvedbo pastoralno-teološke analize se opiramo na ugotovitve družboslovnih raziskav o religioznosti mladih in ta spoznanja povezujemo s trenutnimi nauki Katoliške Cerkve. Poleg tega vključujemo nove ideje iz javnega diskurza, namenjene izboljšanju pastoralne oskrbe mladih. Končni cilj je ponuditi uporabne ideje za razvoj učinkovitega odziva na izzive, ki jih predstavlja sekularizacija, s čimer krepimo in ohranjamo krščansko vero med mlajšo generacijo.

Ključne besede: sekularizacija, mladina, mladinska pastorala, evangelizacija, družbeni apostolat

1. Introduction

Secularisation, combined with the forces of globalisation, cultural revolution, individualism, subjectivism, moral relativism and modern information and communication technologies, is having a significant impact on the religious landscape, especially among the younger generation in Euro-Atlantic civilisation. While the roots of secularisation date back to the late Middle Ages, its intensification came with the philosophical currents of the Age of Enlightenment, while the acceleration of this social process is linked to the transformative cultural changes brought about by the sexual revolution initiated in the 1960s and continuing to the present.

There is no ubiquitous definition of secularisation that is accepted by researchers. José Casanova distinguishes between “secular”, “secularisation”, and “secularism” depending on the scientific discipline, as well as the social and political context. The “secular” has become a central modern category – theologico-philosophical, legal-political, and cultural-anthropological – to construct, codify, grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from “the religious.” Phenomenologically, one can explore the different types of “secularities” as they are codified, institutionalised, and experienced in various modern contexts and the parallel and correlated transformations of modern “religiosities” and “spiritualities.” By contrast, “secularisation” is a social process that involves the separation of the secular sphere from religious institutions and norms; the decline of interest in religious beliefs and practices in society; and the marginalisation of religion into the private sphere. In contrast, “secularism” is a social phenomenon controlled by anti-religious ideologues attempting to accelerate the natural process of secularisation. Secularism becomes dangerous when it is treated as a tool of legal oppression of God-believing citizens by politicians in power who are hostile to religion. (Casanova 2009, 1050–1051)

Jörg Stolz, in his address to members of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion in 2020, expressed that sociological research, after the “neoclassical phase” of the secularization debate, which he dates to 1960–1985 (discussi-

on of abstract concepts), and a “contentious phase” dating from 1986–2000 (empirical testing of theories), had moved into a phase with the turn of the millennium (after 2000), in which there was a consensus among sociologists that, having passed through a “fuzzy phase,” religion was now in general decline. According to Stolz, the modern understanding of the secularisation paradigm “is not so different from the neoclassical version of secularisation theory – but its mechanisms are better defined, and many of its elements have been empirically tested” (Stolz 2020, 300). Most sociologists agree that modernisation creates problems for religion, but there is still no answer to the question of how it happens and why it happens. One of the most plausible answers to the question of why religion is weakening is the emergence of secular competition (Voas 2020, 327).

The propagation of secularisation in modern society is undeniable. Ultimately, the aim is to derive why secularisation is taking place, when it is taking place and where it is taking place and, once these basic parameters regarding secularisation have been defined, to determine which aspects of modernisation have the greatest impact on the weakening of religious attitudes, especially the religious attitudes of young people.

2. Background and Method

Citing the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II called young people the hope of the Church and urged them to take up the Church’s mission to build a better world (John Paul II 1985, 15–16). Starting from the above assumption, we want to present the current picture of youth religiosity in Europe obtained based on social research reports conducted in the last decade (Pew Research Center 2017, 2018a; 2018b; Bullivant 2018; Deželan and Lavrič 2021; Szymczak and Adamczyk 2022). Starting from a critical analysis of data from the social sciences, we intend to derive conclusions and identify pastoral postulates aimed at providing an adequate response to the pervasive propagation of secularism for those responsible for the religious formation of young people – especially parents, educators, catechists, teachers and parish pastors. It should be noted that the reported proposals for changes in youth ministry do not cover all possible facets of this vast issue. On the other hand, the symptoms of changes in the religiosity of the current generation of young people necessitate directions for adequate pastoral intervention, which is taken into account in the adopted structure of this study.

3. The Current State of Youth Religiosity in Europe

Sociological studies carried out in the West in the 21st century have confirmed that modernisation leads to more existential security, more education, more pluralism and more secular competition, which reduces religious socialisation and the availability of children for religious socialisation (Stolz 2020, 299–300). These are

the main underpinnings of the “cohort replacement theory”, according to which successive generations are increasingly disconnected from religion, mainly due to the decline of religious socialisation in increasingly secular social environments. In fact, the decline of the traditional family, based on religious marriage, is the main factor explaining the decline in religiosity, especially among young people, since the family is the main socialising factor (Pereira Coutinho and Wilkins-Lafamme 2023, 320).

The religiosity of young people in different regions of Europe varies, as research by the Pew Research Center (2017; 2018a; 2018b) has shown. The main dividing line stretches between East and West. This division is firmly rooted in history, dating back to the Western Schism of 1054. After World War II, a more important factor in this division was the domination of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, which resulted in a forced acceleration of secularisation in most countries in the region. The exceptions are Poland and Croatia, where resistance to communism fostered the consolidation of Catholic identity. However, this factor spontaneously receded after the political breakthrough that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. Other dividing lines of religiosity in Europe were drawn in the 16th century by the Reformation. Due to current denominational divisions, youth religiosity differs significantly between the Northern European region, dominated by Protestant religions, and Southern Europe, where the vast majority are Catholics or Orthodox believers (Bullivant 2018). Like Eastern Europe, Western Europe also had its exceptions in countries such as Portugal and Spain, where Catholicism was closely associated with authoritarian governments until the mid-1970s.

Patterns of religiosity are different in Western, Northern, Southern, Central and Eastern Europe (Voas and Debler 2011, 55–56). An interesting country in Europe is Slovenia, which lies on the border between East and West, and between the North and South of Europe. One can surmise that historical conditions and cultural influences have affected the country’s community from all possible directions. So what is the religiosity of the country’s youth? The answer to this question can be found in a report of the results of representative broadcasts conducted on behalf of the Slovenian government in 2020:

“Catholicism has been losing favor among young Slovenes at least since the beginning of the 21st century. In a broader perspective, this means that religion is losing its potential to be a source of youth identity – the share of those who do not identify with any religion has increased from 24% in 2010 to 40% in 2020. Secularization trends are also present with regards to church visitation. Since 2013, we have been witnessing a significant increase (from 30% to 43%) in the share of those who never go to church. We should note, however, that the falling trend of those who regularly visit church every week has, at the same time, reversed, so that the level in 2020 was the same as in 2000. This means that we are witnessing a mild polarizing trend among young people as regards religion.” (Deželan and Lavrič 2021, 69–70)

Pereira Coutinho and Wilkins-Laflamme note that the results of previous studies of the religiosity of young people from Catholic countries in Europe are vague, depending on the research methodology used, especially the different parameters of religiosity used, as well as the omission of some countries from individual studies. However, despite some discrepancies in the data and the extent of secularization in different countries, the first set of findings shows that the replacement of the youngest cohort of the populations studied is taking place in both Western and Eastern Europe, even if it started at different levels due to different socio-political contexts (Pereira Coutinho and Wilkins-Laflamme 2023, 326). Secularization, individualization and privatization are currently common processes in all regions of Europe.

Despite some differences and exceptions, research in recent years has confirmed the following theses: a) young people in Europe are less religious than older people; b) young people are becoming less religious as they age (341).

Directional proposals for the renewal of youth ministry in the insightful critical analysis of the process of secularisation, Janez Vodičar cites the achievements of Talal Asad, who, using the genealogical method, has been trying for many years to show the genesis of secularism and confronts what is “secular” not only with religion itself, but also with tradition. Asad, who has experienced Christian, Muslim and Hindu influences since childhood, revives the discussion of secularisation, confronting his philosophical views with the theses of sociologists of religion from the West, especially J. Casanova. It is impossible to recall this discussion here, even in the greatest summary, but I want to quote the thought of Vodičar, who rightly criticizes the preconceived notion in Europe that “modern pluralistic society is the pinnacle of civilization” and that “secularism should be defended in every respect, without even knowing what it actually means” (Vodičar 2020, 254). I completely share this view. However, if the Catholic Church in Europe wants to preserve its vitality, it is not enough to criticise and oppose the dominant cultural trends in European societies. The Church must prioritise pastoral ministry among young people with a clear missionary, evangelistic and catechumenal orientation. Christian formation can involve even very small groups of young people, but it should be deep and strong enough to give young Europeans the knowledge and courage to bear witness to Christ among their peers. An ambitious youth ministry program requires, first of all, the expansion of the subject of this ministry to include well-prepared young lay animators (Polak 2018), as well as the use of new electronic technologies in church communication and the modern language used by most of today’s youth.

4. Reviving of (Pre)-Evangelisation

For a pastoral theologian, the situation of the progressive erosion of religiosity among the youth of Europe raises the question, what should be done in pastoral care to halt and preferably reverse this cultural trend, which is clearly unfavourable

for the Church? One possible direction of pastoral activity is to revive pre-evangelisation activities. This involves various ventures organised in the pre-fields of religious faith, mainly cultural events. Pope Paul VI pointed out that pre-evangelisation can be served by an infinite number of means, especially “open preaching, as well as art, scientific research, philosophical inquiry, the correct awakening of the feelings and longings of the human spirit” (Paul VI 1975, 51).

According to Pope Benedict XVI, three avenues are fundamental in the search for God by non-believers in Him: the world, man and the witness of the lives of believers (Benedict XVI 2012, 39–41).

Naturally, pre-evangelisation should be regarded as a preliminary stage in the process that ultimately leads to evangelisation, i.e. the proclamation of the salvific kerygma, which is Jesus Christ and His Gospel. At the same time, it is worth noting that the beginnings of pre-evangelisation are often very far from the final goal of evangelisation. This can be compared to an expedition to the highest mountain peaks in the world. The lengthy preparation of such a large expedition has little to do with the joy, happiness and sense of fulfilment experienced only when the goal of the expedition is achieved. Such preparations sometimes take years, are multifaceted in nature, place high demands on the candidates, and usually only a few of them reach the summit. No one draws the conclusion from the above reasoning that, since things are like this, it is not worth the arduous effort of preparing an expedition. The same is true of pre-evangelisation. Even if only a small portion of the people covered by it reach the knowledge of the truth of the faith and accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour, it is worth undertaking (Przygoda 2019a, 49–50).

The youngest generation of Europeans is heavily influenced by the consumerist and hedonistic culture of utilitarianism. Practical materialism, individualism, subjectivism and sometimes narcissism are the characteristics of this generation, which has no desire to ask great questions about the meaning and purpose of life and no strength to take up the struggle for great ideas, including the development of personal faith. Young people who still attend religious lessons at school are not attracted by the desire to learn about metaphysical reality, but rather by the pleasant and friendly atmosphere in the lessons (Szymczak and Adamczyk 2022, 97). Today, there are many old and new ways of communicating faith, but at the core of undertaking the task of transmitting faith to others is the personal experience of God, which is born in prayer and nourished by adoration of God. Only a person transformed by Christ and filled with his Spirit can then become His witness and thus a transmitter of faith to others (Przygoda 2019a, 61–62).

Opportunities for both pre-evangelisation and evangelisation of youth in many European countries are provided by religious lessons retained in public and private schools. In Poland, religious lessons were restored to schools after the communist era in 1990. From the beginning, this fact engendered much controversy and was the subject of many debates and public discussions, which are also being revived today, especially in the context of election campaigns. The majority of the

public, parents and children accepted religious instruction in school. For many Poles with differing views, it was important to guarantee the non-compulsory nature of religious instruction at school, which, by the way, was enshrined in the law from the beginning. Unfortunately, recently in Poland there has been a tendency mainly among secondary school students, especially those living in the largest cities, to abandon school religious education, with the result that the Catholic Church in Poland is slowly losing this important tool for religious influence on young people (Małkosa, Zajac, and Zakrzewski 2022).

Religious teachers cannot overlook their students' approach to faith, but it must be incorporated into a new strategy of action. Claims that the grading system or some pressure from external factors can change something in the views of young people must be rejected. A religion lesson should never become similar to a physics or history lesson, but this should be seen not as a failure, but as an opportunity. As Janusz Mariński (2020, 42) notes:

“Religious instruction at school is for some students /.../ the only clear form of contact with the Church, and for catechists an opportunity to conduct pre-evangelization. Even if religious education at school has become a social fact, it remains an open question about the effectiveness of its impact on the religious consciousness of children and adolescents.”

The opportunity for the future shape of religion lessons – especially in high school – is its existential and dialogical character. The inductive method should be used, and the truths of faith should be presented inclusively. Since adolescents want to talk about the problems they experience, the starting point of each lesson unit should be a conversation about their experiences, from which only the religious theme should be derived, and solutions to the problems suggested by the Christian faith should be consistently given. The overemphasis on the intellectual dimension of religion lessons leads to the transformation of these units into lessons in religiology, and these, unfortunately, are unlikely to contribute to the growth of young people's faith attitudes. It is far more important for the Church to have a formative impact on students. Religion teachers need to liberate themselves from the dream of influencing crowds and focus more on a personal relationship with individual students. Let them be convinced that if they can save and strengthen the faith of one student, they can potentially also save the faith of his future spouse, then his children and maybe even his grandchildren. Religion in school, with the weakening condition of the family, makes great sense and is worth fighting for in any country, in any social, political or cultural setting.

5. Active Participation in Building the Community of the Church

Building the community of the Church is accomplished through participation in religious practices, which are derived from an attitude of faith. It is difficult to expect

a person who does not believe in God to participate in some forms of worship, although it sometimes happens, which can be explained by the fact that people do not always act in a logical and consistent manner. The level of participation in religious practices among young people in Europe varies. 70% of Czech young adults and about 60% of Spanish, Dutch, British and Belgian young adults never attend religious services. Only 2% of young Catholics in Belgium, 3% in Hungary and Austria, 5% in Lithuania and 6% in Germany say they attend weekly Mass. This contrasts sharply with their peers in Poland (47%), Portugal (27%), the Czech Republic (24%) and Ireland (24%). Weekly Mass attendance is 7% among the French and 17% among British young Catholics. In addition, 80% of Czech young adults and about 70% of Swedes, Danes, Estonians, Dutch, French and Norwegians “never” pray (Bullivant 2018, 7).

In the community of the Church, there are various attempts to revive religious practices, but pastors do not always take into account the fact that these practices are a consequence of a developed attitude of faith. Thus, any endeavour to get young people to engage in religious practices must go hand in hand with revitalising their faith. However, it is conceivable that due to extreme religious experience during religious practices, faith can also be awakened from dormancy. This sometimes happens during services combined with intercessory prayer for healing, during pilgrimages to holy places, or during the extreme Stations of the Cross (a practice known in Poland that involves walking from 15 to even more than 40 kilometres in silence at night). Nevertheless, more important seems to be the persistent presentation of the proposition of faith in the direct contact of the pastor, religion teacher, parent, peer, friend, as well as the presence of this proposition in the virtual world, where modern youth spend a lot of time.

An attitude of faith is born primarily from hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17). However, preaching the Gospel in a secular environment places specific demands on the preacher. On the one hand, the essence of the Gospel remains unchanged, as it is still the good news communicated to people by God. Therefore, when preaching the word of God, one should always keep in mind the unchanged Gospel and the current life of the Church and theology, which is an adequate interpretation of the revealed word of God. On the other hand, however, the preacher should listen to people, understand their problems and try to answer people's questions and desires. According Leszek Szewczyk (2021, 730–731):

“Preaching the word of God to secularized people should begin with arousing a longing for God. /.../ The homiletic literature points to five expectations of the modern listener of the word of God: rescue, especially in difficult life situations; opening to the future, that is, helping to see the way of life and indicating possible steps; critical time signal, ability to recognize the signs of the times; explanation of the situation in which the man found himself based on the biblical message; solidarity, that is, the accompaniment and compassion of a person and a Christian who does not have simple answers ready, but is aware of complex life situations.”

Young people's expectations of the preacher are definitely higher than those of older people who are stable in their attitude of faith. Young people have much perturbation with themselves, in their relationships with parents, friends, colleagues, and in their relationship or lack of relationship with God. That's why in sermons they expect answers to many questions they sometimes can't even articulate. The preacher should empathise with the problems of young people, answer their most fundamental questions and desires, and lead young listeners to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Today, there is no place in preaching for authoritarianism and clericalism, but the preaching of the word of God, especially among the young, is about enriching each other in mutual dialogue (Vodičar 2024, 25).

The relationship of young people to the Church is mainly based on traditions passed down from their parents and family of origin. Consequently, it is often not a bond of a personal nature, resulting in strong religious convictions and commitment to its life. However, many young people are not indifferent to the proposals made by the Church, but expect from it, above all, some form of experience of God (*sacrum*) and an experience of community.

Young people report the need for priests to be more accessible than at present, to be ready to meet them and offer them time, to create external conditions for meeting and dialogue (Szymczak and Adamczyk 2022, 69). The Catholic Church, other churches and religious denominations in Europe in contemporary society must recognise that they no longer have the exclusive right to shape human behaviour to remain in competition with other institutions.

A legitimate question is: what can be changed in the Church community to make its offer interesting to young people? As Mariański (2012, 99) notes, a new style of life and pastoral ministry is needed, "not a style of disapproval and threat, but one full of merciful concern for the formation of consciences and the transformation of a faith 'inherited' and out of habit, into a faith that is a personal choice, convinced and confirmed by the witness of life". The Catholic Church is obliged to accompany people on the path of their salvation in every environment and at every stage of their journey. This is especially important with regard to young people, in order to first find them and establish some form of communication, then to rebuild the trust in the institution of the Catholic Church that has recently been damaged by cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. Only then can an attempt be made to enter into a dialogue with the young, in which there will be room for a conversation about a meaningful life, about happy fulfilment in love, which is possible, among other things, in a well-ordered marriage and family life. However, such a modus of life requires the adoption and observance of moral principles also in the field of human sexuality. This is not an easy task, but it is probably still achievable. The Catholic Church has its stable moral principles that make high demands on people in the field of sexuality, but in the pastoral care of young people, it is not enough to communicate these principles; it is necessary to show paths for their implementation that guarantee lasting satisfaction and not just a temporary feeling of happiness.

In terms of youth evangelisation, an important issue is building positive attitudes toward the Church. To build lasting attitudes, expressed in action, both conviction and experience, derived from experience, are necessary. To build positive attitudes toward the Church, it is therefore necessary to personally experience it as a true community. This should be accompanied by various emotional-spiritual states such as a sense of happiness, contentment, joy, elation. However, what is at stake here is such an experience, which is not just a mere experience, but also a decision of the will, a holistic, complex, deeply existential act of the person, giving a specific, fundamental direction to human life (Stotwińska 2004, 223–224). Of course, the open question is how to realistically achieve this. It seems that it is necessary to let young people act in the first place. They are the ones who have the ideas: sometimes they organise an evening of prayer vigil (evening of praise) and invite their peers to the event, sometimes an evangelistic concert in the city's parks and other times an evangelistic meeting in a large sports hall combined with joint singing and testimonies of good Christian life presented by young people's idols. To put it in Pope Francis' favourite figurative language, "it takes two to dance," but this time "the one who has to invite the bishop, pastor, religion teacher to dance" is the young person – not the other way around.

6. Fostering Social Activity through Participation in the Church's Apostolate

An old Indian proverb states: "As long as children are young, give them roots; but if they become older, give them wings." (Halczuk 2017, 71) "Wings", according to the cited wisdom, mean opportunities for action—development through meaningful activity, especially social activity. The experience of the two decades of the 21st century indicates that young people are particularly open to involvement in various forms of volunteerism. Volunteering is based on universally accepted humanistic values, so it is ecumenical and universal in religious terms. The Catholic Church organises and patronises groups of volunteers, since the idea of volunteering is consistent with its communal and missionary nature. Since its inception, the Church has not only undertaken various charitable activities but also organised its own groups of active social activists. Nowadays, the activity of Christian volunteers, combined with the approval of the Church, takes on the characteristics of the apostolate (Przygoda 2012, 78–98). Volunteerism is one of the forms of social apostolate of the laity, which in essence consists in the conformity of life to the faith, in the honest performance of domestic, social and professional duties, through which other people are drawn to love the truth and the good, and ultimately to Christ and the Church. The social nature of man and the Christian vocation to holiness require apostolic involvement in various areas of social life.

A great value of volunteering is that it provides young people with an opportunity for personal development, strengthening self-reliance and creativity, completing interesting apprenticeships and gaining experience, so often desired by

employers. Young volunteers learn responsibility for themselves and for others, gain self-confidence and decisiveness in action, learn to become active citizens and work for the common good. In addition, they help cultivate sensitivity to values such as brotherhood and selfless assistance to people in distress. In this perspective, volunteering can be seen as a continuation of lifelong education for young people, which should result, among other things, in a better position in the labour market (Przygoda 2019b, 91–110). In addition, volunteering is an important instrument for preparing young people for a life of Christian marriage and family, which requires pro-social attitudes and sacrificial love (2023). Therefore, all forms of social involvement, charitable and cultural endeavours, should be encouraged in youth ministry, as they can provide an opportunity to experience the blessing of good deeds toward neighbours. And from doing good to one's neighbour, the road to a good God is sometimes quite short.

7. Adopt Forms of Communication that Resonate with Today's Youth

Communication problems are manifesting into key issues in the Church's evangelisation activities, since most of Europe's youth today are placed on the fringes of the Church community. And this means that without adequate pastoral assistance in the near future, they may find themselves completely outside this community. It is reassuring to adults who have influence over today's adolescents that, when asked about their expectations of communication, they yearn for good relationships with their parents and peers. Here, there is an opportunity for formative influence on adolescents by their parents, which calls for greater pastoral care of the domestic church. Parents need to be given the tools for effective religious formation of their children, which in turn requires the development of multiple forms of family ministry in dioceses, deaneries and parishes (Goleń 2017, 189–199).

The second way to effectively communicate with youth requires creating peer environments for the development of living faith (Fiałkowski 2018, 235–258). In small religious groups, young people can find what they expect from the world and the Church. It is in such environments that they can affirm their self-reliance, demonstrate their creativity, adopt axiological systems from below (not imposed on them from the outside, which they resent in their sense of freedom), use their entrepreneurial spirit, arrange the world in their own way, unlike the world of their parents, etc. Of course, for this endeavour to bear good fruit from the point of view of the Church's salvific purpose, these environments must be saturated with well-prepared animators. We have certain experiences in Poland that need to be revived, purified, as well as developed and promoted in other European countries. I have in mind the systems of Christian formation proposed by the Light-Life Movement, the Catholic Youth Association, the Schools of the New Evangelisation, as well as the "Youth on the Threshold" formation program already being implemented in 12 dioceses in Poland.

Such forms of communication between pastors and catechists and young people as amateur theatre groups, pilgrimages and integration camps, sports and recreational events, should be encouraged. It is important that, on the occasion of such seemingly distant events from the life of the Church, opportunities should be given for direct contacts, one-on-one conversations, and discussions with peers, which can, over time, open a young person to metaphysical questions and, consequently, to seek answers to them in the sources of the Christian faith. In pastoral work with young people, it is necessary to allow them to personally create their own path in life, to take advantage of the desire for competition, entrepreneurial spirit and ingenuity that is natural for this period of personal development. Young people have a natural need to show that they can arrange the world better than their parents' generation.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the contemporary form of secularisation has a significant impact on the Christian faith of young people in Europe. The positive elements of the secularisation process should be recognised, especially the recognition and liberation from the evil of religious fanaticism or fundamentalism. The cultural revolution we are facing in the first decades of the 21st century is leading many young people to axiological emptiness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, despair, and sometimes even to suicidal ideation and attempts. This generation does not have to be a generation lost to God. It seems that Generation Z is already slowly feeling a hunger for God and will soon begin to open more widely to His proposals. However, it is necessary to 'open the eyes' of this generation to the world of imperishable values, which also give a deeper meaning to worldly life. This is the pressing task of Christian parents, educators, teachers, catechists, parish pastors, but also of young evangelizers, who can ignite faith in the hearts of their peers with greater conviction and credibility. For young people who were not fortunate enough to be born into families that practice faith in God, the chance to find Him is in religious associations, where one can experience a living relationship with divine persons and with each other.

An important impetus to intensify the concern for the faith of young people was given to the community of the Catholic Church by the 2018 Synod of Bishops, as reflected in Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation "Christus vivit." In his message to young people, the Pope keeps returning to the question: how to revitalise the Christian life of young people, which is closely related to reviving the evangelising zeal of all members of the Church community. In Pope Francis' view, a great opportunity to attract young people to Christ and the Church is their social commitment, which was still high in light of data gathered from around the world before the Synod of Bishops. We know that the period of the COVID-19 pandemic somewhat disrupted this social enthusiasm of the youth. However, the situation is now slowly returning to normal. Young people are again eagerly embracing the social

ventures offered to them by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This is a “kairos” and an opportunity that the Church must not miss. According to Pope Francis, “social engagement and direct contact with the poor remain a fundamental opportunity to discover or deepen one’s faith and discern one’s vocation” (Francis 2019, 170).

References

- Benedict XVI.** 2012. The ways that lead to knowledge of God. General Audience. Vatican, 14. 11. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121114.html (accessed 28. 2. 2024).
- Bullivant, Stephen.** 2018. *Europe’s Young Adults and Religion* London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society.
- Casanova, José.** 2009. The Secular and Secularisms. *Social Research* 76, no. 4:1049–1066.
- Coutinho, José Pereira, and Sarah Wilkins-Lafamme.** 2023. Youth Religiosity in Catholic European Countries. *Journal of Religion in Europe* 16, no. 3:316–351. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-bja10087>
- Dezelan, Tomaz, and Miran Lavric, eds.** 2021. *Youth 2020: The Position of Young People in Slovenia*. Maribor; Ljubljana: University of Maribor Press; University of Ljubljana Press.
- Fiałkowski, Marek.** 2018. Rola zrzeczeń religijnych we wspólnotowym towarzyszeniu młodzieży w rozwoju wiary. In: Piotr Ochotny, Mateusz J. Tutak and Tomasz Wielebski, eds. *Duszpasterstwo młodzieży w Polsce wobec wyzwań współczesności*, 235–258. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo i Księgarnia „Gotów” KSM.
- Francis.** 2019. Christus vivit. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican, 25. 3. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html (accessed 22. 2. 2024).
- Goleń, Jacek.** 2017. Umacnianie duszpasterstwa rodzin w parafii. In: Jacek Goleń, ed. *Towarzyszyć małżeństwu i rodzinie. Inspiracje adhortacji apostolskiej „Amoris laetitia” dla duszpasterstwa rodzin*, 189–199. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Halczuk, Piotr.** 2017. Wegaufrufe für diejenigen, die Jugendliche begleiten wollen. In: Mieczysław Polak, Teresa Kowalczyk and Petr Slouk, eds. *Jugend in Europa: Religiosität Jugendlicher im Kontext von Beheimatung, Eventkultur und Migration*, 71–78.
- Pastoraltheologische Hefte 10.** Gniezno: PoSt Netzwerk.
- John Paul II.** 1985. Dilecti amici. Apostolic Letter. Vatican, 31. 3. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici.html (accessed 22. 2. 2024).
- Mariański, Janusz.** 2012. Kościół katolicki w przestrzeni życia publicznego. In: Józef Baniak ed. *Religia i Kościół w społeczeństwie demokratycznym i obywatelskim w Polsce. Między losem a wyborem*, 75–103. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WNS UAM.
- . 2020. Pedagogika religii w kontekście społecznym. *Edukacja Międzykulturowa*, no. 2:21–49.
- Mąkosa, Paweł M., Marian Zając, and Grzegorz Zakrzewski.** 2022. Opting out of Religious Education and the Religiosity of Youth in Poland: A Qualitative Analysis. *Religions* 13, no. 10:906. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100906> (accessed 23. 2. 2024).
- Paul VI.** 1975. Evangelii nuntiandi. Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican, 8. 12. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (accessed 21. 5. 2024).
- Pew Research Center.** 2017. Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe. 10. 5. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/> (accessed 14. 2. 2024).
- . 2018a. Being Christian in Western Europe. 29. 5. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/> (accessed 14. 2. 2024).
- . 2018b. Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities and Key Social Issues. 29. 10. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues> (accessed 14. 2. 2024).
- Polak, Mieczysław.** 2018. Formacja kapłanów i animatorów do duszpasterstwa młodzieży. In: Piotr Ochotny, Mateusz J. Tutak and Tomasz Wielebski eds. *Duszpasterstwo młodzieży w*

Polsce wobec wyzwań współczesności, 65–78. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo i Księgarnia „Gotów” KSM.

Przygoda, Wiesław. 2012. *Apostolski wymiar wolontariatu w Polsce: Studium teologiczno-pastoralne na podstawie badań wolontariuszy z parafialnych zespołów Caritas*. Lublin: TNKUL.

---. 2017. Jugendseelsorge – eine verlorene Chance? In: Mieczysław Polak, Teresa Kowalczyk, and Petr Slouk, eds. *Jugend in Europa: Religiosität Jugendlicher im Kontext von Beheimatung, Eventkultur und Migration*, 57–62. Pastoraltheologische Hefte 10. Gniezno: Post Netzwerk.

---. 2019a. Formacja dorosłych wobec kryzysu wiary. *Warszawskie Studia Pastoralne* 2:45–65.

---. 2019b. Wolontariat narzędziem formacji prospołecznej młodzieży. *Społeczeństwo* 2:91–110.

---. 2022. What Parish for the 21st Century? Parish Renewal Guidelines in the Context of Current Cultural Changes in Europe. *Bogoslovni vestnik* 82, no. 2:445–457. <http://doi.org/10.34291/BV2022/02/Przygoda> (accessed 26. 2. 2024).

---. 2023. Volunteering as an Instrument for Preparing Young People for Christian Marriage and Family Life. *Religions* 14, no. 9:1150. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091150> (accessed 12. 2. 2024).

Ślotwińska, Helena. 2004. *Kształtowanie postaw religijnych na katechezie*. Lublin: KUL.

Stolz, Jörg. 2020. Secularization Theories in the Twenty-First Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems, *Social Compass* 67, no. 2:282–308.

Szewczyk, Leszek. 2021. The Specific Content of Preaching the Word of God in a Secularized Environment. *Bogoslovni vestnik/ Theological Quarterly* 81, no. 3:721–732. <https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2021/03/Szewczyk> (accessed 27. 2. 2024).

Szymczak, Wioletta, and Tomasz Adamczyk. 2022. *Młodzież w kontekstach współczesnych. Rodzina. Czas. Szkoła. Kościół i katecheza*. Lublin: KUL.

Voas, David. 2020. Is the Secularization Research Programme Progressing? Debate on Jörg Stolz’s Article on Secularization Theories in the 21st Century: Ideas, Evidence, and Problems. *Social Compass* 67, no. 2:323–329.

Voas, David, and Stefanie Doebler. 2011. Secularization in Europe: Religious Change between and within Birth Cohorts. *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 4, no. 1:39–62.

Vodičar, Janez. 2020. Kritika sekularizacije: tradicija kot pot do trdožive prihodnosti. *Bogoslovni vestnik* 80, no. 2:253–266. <https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2020/02/Vodicar> (accessed 30. 1. 2024).

---. 2024. The homily as a way to the synodal Church. The possibility of building a responsible laity. *Polonia Sacra* 28, no 1: 7-28; <https://doi.org/10.15633/ps.28101>.