Adam Bielinowicz[1]

EDUCATING A TRUTHFUL USER OF THE INTERNET

Abstract

This paper analyses the question about the role of school-based religious education in the preparation for living in truth, with an emphasis on the online activity of the catechised. It presents the findings produced by an analysis of the two most recent documents: *Directory for Catechesis* and the *Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* and proposes postulates on catechetical service in reference to the issue of truthfulness and falsehood during Internet use.

Keywords: religious education, catechesis, Internet, truth, falsehood

WYCHOWAĆ PRAWDOMÓWNEGO INTERNAUTĘ

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie: jaką rolę może pełnić szkolne nauczanie religii w kontekście wychowania do życia w prawdzie, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem aktywności katechizowanych w świecie wirtualnym. W niniejszym opracowaniu przedstawiono wyniki analizy dwóch najnowszych dokumentów: *Dyrektorium o katechizacji* i *Podstawy programowej katechezy Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce* oraz zaproponowano postulaty dotyczące posługi katechetycznej w odniesieniu do zagadnienia prawdomówności i fałszu w obszarze korzystania z Internetu.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczanie religii, katecheza, Internet, prawda, fałsz

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Introduction

The dignity of a person originates from the essence of their human nature as a free and rational being. As persons created in the image and likeness of God, we are able to make independent and responsible decisions about God, ourselves and the community we live in. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "[m]an tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honour and bear witness to it"[2]. That is why John Paul II, in the homily delivered on 6 June 1991 in Olsztyn, has referred to the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue to emphasise that: "Thus human actions must be in accord with the requirements of truthfulness. Truth is good, whereas lies, hypocrisy and falsehood are evil, which human beings experience in various dimensions of their lives"[3]. These words were spoken at a unique moment in the history of our Fatherland, during the days of an advancing political, cultural, and social transformation. The year 1990 marked the abolition of censorship, which had curbed the freedom of speech and banned the full truth from the media, the press and scientific publications. However, giving people the option of truthfulness was insufficient to eradicate falsity from public space. Freedom of expression is a great social good and the right of all men, but in no way does it protect the truth. When misinterpreted, truth serves to propagate lies and distort the image of reality. This phenomenon, though present in various areas of social life, is particularly conspicuous in the realm of the Internet, where a user is no longer a mere recipient but, more and more frequently, takes up the role of an author. The words of the Pope were spoken in the year when CERN scientists had barely completed the WWW standard[4]. Yet, they have lost none of their relevance. To the contrary, they are becoming a source of inspiration for both the users themselves and the people responsible for the education of the young generation browsing the Web.

In the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the Pope's pilgrimage to Poland and the phenomena observed on the Internet, I believe it worthwhile to ask the following questions: How to educate the youngest generation for truth, if they see the global network as a real rather than virtual sphere used for learning about the world, building social relationships and shaping the modern reality? Can education for truth help overcome the relativisation of truth in social media, student comments posted online or widespread hate speech? Can

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2   *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego* [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Pallottinum, 2002), n. 2467.

3   John Paul II, *Homilia wygłoszona w czasie mszy w Olsztynie w dniu 6 czerwca 1991 roku* [*Homily delivered at a Mass in Olsztyn on 6 June 1991*], access 11.12.2020, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/25olsztyn_06061991.html. Translator's note: Quoted as in: „The Ethos of the Word", *Ethos* 25, 1–2 (2012), access 12.01.2021, http://www.ethos.lublin.pl/images/media/products/2012/Abstracts.pdf.

4   On 12 November 1990, the British scientist Tim Berners-Lee together with the Belgian scientist Robert Cailliau put forward an official proposal for the construction of a hypertext system called the "World Wide Web" (abbreviated to "WWW)" and accessed through an Internet browser. The system was a huge milestone on the path of Web development and has been widely used ever since. Wired Staff, "20 Years Ago, Web's Founders Ask for Funding", *Business* 11.12.2010, access 14.12.2020, https://www.wired.com/2010/11/20-years-ago-the-webs-founders-ask-for-funding.

it save young people from the personal drama of defamation, false accusations, ridicule and deprivation of dignity, which often leads to personal tragedies among adolescents and children? Finally, what shape should such education take in practice?

The answers to these questions should be sought in environments aiming to support parents in the formation of their offspring, the family being the primary environment therefor. It is family that should ensure not only the material needs of the children but also their development, oriented at the attainment of social maturity and responsibility which find a manifestation in truthfulness. The environments which provide parents with formative support include school and, not accidentally, the Church. For centuries, the Church has proclaimed the Christian concept of education which allows people to form a positive image of themselves and their environment. Therefore, this paper aims to present the role of school-based religious education and the tasks faced by catechists[5] in the context of catechetical education on the responsibility for the online content published by the catechised. To that end, the paper analyses the two most recent documents: *Directory for Catechesis*[6] (hereinafter: *Directory*) and the *Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland*[7] (hereinafter: *Core Curriculum*), with an emphasis on the matter of truthfulness and falsehood in online activity. The final part presents the conclusions and postulates regarding catechetical work, formulated on the basis of the analysed content.

1. Analysis of the *Directory on Catechesis*

On 23 March 2020, the Holy Father Francis approved the latest *Directory*. The document is an update on the previous *General Directory for Catechesis* compiled by the Congregation for the Clergy and published by the Apostolic See in 1997. The latest document was drafted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and constitutes an important stage on the path of the dynamic catechetical renewal within the Roman Catholic Church. The text gives expression to a reflection on the changes unfolding in the modern world and a new systematisation of the catechesis, aimed to give way to the primacy of the gospel. The *Directory* contains three parts and 12 chapters. The first part deals with the role of catechesis in the evangelising mission of the Church. Among other things, it is a reminder about the proper formation of the catechists; it obliges them to meet high requirements and emphasises their role as credible witnesses of the faith. The

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5　In this paper, the terms: *catechist*, *catechised*, and *catechesis* are understood in the broad sense and applied interchangeably with the terms: *religion teacher*, *student*, and *school-based religion class*, according to the established modern understanding and common usage, even though the terms are not strictly equivalent.

6　The document has also been published in Polish: Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji [Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization], *Dyrektorium o katechizacji* [*Directory for Catechesis*] (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Jedność, 2020) (hereinafter: DC). Translator's note: Due to the unavailability of the original text, citations from DC are provided as back translations from the Polish language.

7　Konferencja Episkopatu Polski [Polish Episcopal Conference], *Podstawa programowa katechezy Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce* [*The Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland*] (Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła, 2018) (hereinafter: CC).

second part of the document turns the spotlight on the importance of family, which takes an active part in the catechisation and provides its natural arena. Family not only teaches the children about the faith but, above all, bears witness to the faith. The third part of the *Directory* concerns catechesis in the Particular Churches, highlighting the importance of religious education at schools, where a student has the right to complementary education, including spiritual growth as a human person. In this part, the authors of the document also deal with the challenges posed by the digital culture.

In the first part, in the chapter on the faith in Christ as an answer to the self-revealing God, the *Directory* points to the importance of truth in the existence of a human person and their relationship with the Creator. The document emphasises that through intimacy with Jesus, every man can not only know himself but also recognise that he is following the way of truth[8]. The next point of the document cites a passage from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which says that an act of faith has a reference to the truth: "by trust in the person who bears witness to it"[9]. Furthermore, the authors declare that one of the missions of catechesis is to reveal that "a calling to holiness (…) demands and answer in childlikeness, which has the power to veer any situation towards the way of truth and happiness that resides in Christ"[10]. These words testify to an understanding of catechesis that is oriented at being like Christ, also in the dimension of living in truth.

At the beginning of part 2, entitled *The Process of Catechesis*, the authors observe that the truth concerns not only words but also deeds. They point to the figure of Christ himself, who took good care of the formation of his disciples, "taught the truth using his own life as an example"[11], and affirmed that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples on their way to the full truth[12]. The authors then emphasise the importance of the Word of God, which has the power to illuminate the life of man and give it greater meaning by accompanying man "on the way of beauty, truth, and goodness"[13].

The third chapter, particularly the section entitled *Catechesis and Digital Culture*, contains many valuable observations relevant in the context discussed herein. The authors aptly remark that the use of digital tools has helped precipitate profound and complex changes whose cultural, social and psychological consequences are not yet fully investigated or evident. IT devices and universal access to the Internet are the hallmarks of the modern world and their effects have become a matter of course, regarded as something absolutely natural. These changes have occurred over a truly short time and exert a huge impact on our perception of ourselves, other people and the surrounding reality. They have transformed the modern way of communication, teaching and learning, knowledge

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8 Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji [Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization], *Dyrektorium o katechizacji* [*Directory for Catechesis*], n. 17.

9 *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego* [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*], n. 177; DC, 18.

10 DC, n. 83.

11 DC, n. 160.

12 John 16:13.

13 DC, n. 172.

acquisition and even the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships[14]. According to the "Digital 2020" report, most people in the world make use of the Internet, and an average user is online for 6 hours and 43 minutes every day[15]. Thus, the Internet has become more than a part of the established communication cultures. It is in the process of creating a new culture that alters language and the existing traditions, shapes a new mentality and forms a new hierarchy of values. The *Directory* not only notices the changes transpiring with the growth of the Internet but also enumerates their positive and negative aspects[16].

The authors are correct to emphasise that the Internet enables interpersonal communication, access to education and access to information, which fosters the civilisational development of the modern world and may give us means to aid those in need. Moreover, the authors note that nowadays, the Internet and social media, in particular, have provided a space necessary to reach and involve the young in the pastoral actions and initiatives of the Church. What is more, the digital world has expanded and enriched the cognitive capabilities of mankind. In many aspects, "we can speak of a positive digital reinforcement"[17].

The *Directory* emphasises that the virtual space is often "«a realm of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, which takes its most radical form in the dark web. Digital media may expose users to the threats of addiction, isolation and diminishing contact with reality, thus hampering the development of authentic interpersonal bonds. The new forms of violence, referred to as cyber-violence, are spreading through social media. Furthermore, the Internet is a distribution channel for pornography, sex abuse, and gambling» (…). In addition, the digital world represents an arena for «huge economic powers capable of using both subtle and invasive forms of control while creating mechanisms for the manipulation of conscience and the democratic process»"[18].

In the context of the Eighth Commandment, we find valuable insights regarding the operation of multiple web portals which offer a platform for meetings while simultaneously using algorithms that impede the confrontation of opinion by failing to promote or even restricting some contents. These phenomena serve to disseminate "false news and information, while fuelling prejudice and hate"[19]. Thus, they can freely create a distorted vision of reality, leading to a loss of identity, personal tragedies of Internet users and isolation from interpersonal relationships and a positive world of values.

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14 DC, n. 359–360.

15 The latest "Digital 2020" report published by WeAreSocial has provided yet more proof that digital, mobile, and social media are indispensable for people across the world and consume an increasingly larger part of their daily life. Globally, more than 4.5 billion people are using the Internet, and the number of social media users has risen to over 3.8 billion. The most recent trends suggest that this number will continue to rise. Simon Kemp, "Digital 2020 reports", 30.01.2020, access 14.12.2020, https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media.

16 DC, n. 359–360.

17 DC, n. 360.

18 DC, n. 361.

19 DC, n. 361.

What seems particularly important is the observation of the language used by the digital generation. Rather than a line of argumentation, it forms a narrative. Such language is more persuasive, especially to the young, and more involving than traditional forms of discourse. In that model of communication, the narrative becomes the main and often the only effective tool for communication, which obstructs the discovery of the real and the good. Furthermore, "the narrative universe takes the form of an experiment, where everything is possible, everything can be said and truth holds no existential weight"[20]. Although the Church engages in the digital transmission of faith online, which is a necessary practice in the modern world, it must act to raise awareness of the threats posed by the ambivalent language which "may be suggestive, but poorly fit to convey the truth"[21].

In the sections entitled *Digital culture and Educational Questions*, the authors rightly point out that the youngest generation is not always "adequately prepared and culturally equipped to face the challenges of a digital society"[22]. However, this pertains to truthfulness and the discernment between truth and falsehood on the Internet. Nowadays, many young people have given up trying to assess the veracity of digital content[23]. That is why it is of paramount importance for the family, the Church and schools to cooperate in order to prevent social media from becoming the only channel for socialisation and fully replacing the traditional educational environments which have continued to foster the ability to tell the truth from lies and to encourage living in truth for centuries.

2. Analysis of the *Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland*

The most recent *Core Curriculum* was approved on 8 June 2018 at the 379th Plenary Assembly of the Polish Episcopal Conference. It has replaced the document of 2010 and represents a product of the ongoing educational reform, which encompasses in its scope both the curriculum and the organisation of instruction. The new document responds to the challenges of the Polish school, employs the language of learning outcomes and adopts the reformed structure of educational stages; although it differs from the *Core Curriculum for General Education* in the division of primary school into two stages of equal duration (grades I–IV and V–VIII)[24]. Since *Core Curriculum* defines the require-

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20 DC, n. 364.

21 DC, n. 364.

22 DC, n. 368.

23 DC, n. 368.

24 See: Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education in primary schools, incl. for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disability, and for general education in stage I sectoral vocational schools, general education in special schools preparing for employment, and general education in post-secondary schools, Dz.U. [Journal of Laws] of 24 February 2017, item 356; Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 30 January 2018 on the core curriculum for general education in general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and stage II sectoral vocational schools, Dz.U. [Journal of Laws] of 2 March 2018, item 467. The document is available online, access 16.12.2020, https://www.podstawaprogramowa.pl.

ments for students participating in religious education in schools, it is addressed to not only the authors of textbooks and curricula but also religious education teachers.

As a result, it is a practical guide for catechists which offers them easier access to a tangible source of problems, contents, and requirements that they will present to the students.

The authors of the document refer to the problem of truth right from the start, in the part dedicated to the explanation of terminology. They emphasise that the correlation between religious education and school education is necessary, if only due to pedagogical considerations, i.e. to "show students the unity of truth and respect for truth"[25].

As they draft a profile of the youngest primary school students aged 7–11, the authors of *Core Curriculum* observe how rapidly children these days open onto the world of the media. In general, they have no difficulty handling most media devices and eagerly use their cellphones, showing a preference for play rather than communication with others[26]. However, let us note that children at this age are in the process of learning the rudiments of communication, including online communication. Therefore, they require sensitisation to the responsibility arising from the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue, to the presence of falsehood, and to the discernment between truths and lies in the content they encounter on the Internet. At this point, we should remark that even though web portals such as Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat only accept users aged 13 or more, younger children often provide false information about their age to sign up, share photos and talk to their friends. Unfortunately, *Core Curriculum* lacks a clear indication that teachers, including catechists, should pay attention to this trend and the related danger. As children tend to go through their online initiation to social life at the suggestion of their peers, without parents' consent, it appears advisable for the teachers to refer parents – and, upon their consent, the children themselves – to applications addressed at the youngest audience, such as Kudo Kids (ages: 8+)[27], PlayKids Talk (ages: 7+)[28], GoBubble (ages: 3+)[29], Kidzworld (ages: 11–13)[30]. Thanks to these services, equipped with algorithms that ensure child safety and protection and giving full control to the parents, the youngest generation of Internet users may learn the rules of communication and etiquette applicable in social media interactions.

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25 CC, 14. Translator's note: own translation (for all citations from CC).

26 CC, 29.

27 A social media application for sharing photos, which gives children an opportunity to explore the world of social media in a so-called safe environment. Children can edit their photos and share them with an approved list of friends. Photo recipients may only post a like and express a maximum of three positive reactions. User accounts need to be authorised by a parent or a guardian. Friends may be added only upon account authorisation. Authors of the application monitor the photos to ensure that no inappropriate content gets posted. See: access 21.12.2020, https://kodi-kudos.squarespace.com.

28 The application allows children to decorate photos and send emojis to their friends and family, imitating the features available on Instagram. See: access 21.12.2020, https://support.playkids.com/hc/en-us.

29 See: access 21.12.2020, https://gobubble.school/home.

30 See: access 21.12.2020, https://www.kidzworld.com.

An analysis of the specific tasks pertaining to the catechetical goal of moral formation reveals, amid other particular requirements, an observation that a student participating in religious education during the educational stage in question should acquire knowledge and skills sufficient to explain "what truthfulness is"[31]. Furthermore, in the description of the student's character and attitudes (non-graded), the authors have added that the student should strive to remain honest and truthful[32]. Even though the assumptions cited in this paragraph make no direct reference to the activity of students on the Internet, they do correlate with another catechetical goal envisioned for this educational stage, i.e. education for community life. The description of the student's character and attitudes invokes the precious ability to "respect themselves and others in the real and virtual world"[33]. A sign of respect towards another is to tell the truth and avoid falsehood. Consequently, the catechists should pay special attention to this fragment as they discuss students' interpersonal relationships established in the family, at school and on the Internet.

Let us emphasise that the recommendations regarding the conditions and modes for the organisation of religion classes at this educational stage involve specific forms of lessons oriented at "distinguishing the truth and building an emotional connection with the truth"[34], which seems extremely valuable in the context of the current research. The only problem is that the suggested forms of instruction fail to include the use of online sources.

While discussing the correlation between religious and school education, the document emphasises the need to "prepare (students) to use the media (… and to be) truthful)"[35]. Let us note that these recommendations refer to two distinct subjects – the former to arts and the latter to citizenship education. However, even though concerning different subjects, they do seem complementary. Nothing stands in the way of teaching students the meaning of truth in the context of the media, which increasingly often includes the Internet.

Students going through this educational stage are aged 11–15. Their psychological development is particularly pronounced and they live in an expanding social context where truthfulness is of major importance. It is a period when young people learn to use abstract notions. In the mind of the authors, these include the notion of "truth", which the students should already regard as a comprehensible and meaningful theme for reflection and discussion[36]. This assumption finds its confirmation in the fact that the list of basic ethical notions that the student is expected to explore in greater depth opens with "objective moral truth"[37].

The document also contains a direct reference to the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue. The authors assume that students at this stage should acquire sufficient skills

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31 CC, 32.

32 CC, 32.

33 CC, 41.

34 CC, 43.

35 CC, 47.

36 CC, 54.

37 CC, 69.

to justify the value of truthfulness, to recognise the relationship between lies, deception and the debasement of a human person, which is simultaneously the subject and the object of the lie[38]. That assumption leads to the addition of "truthfulness" to the list of student attitudes (non-graded)[39]. It was assumed that in correlation with the citizenship education instructor, the catechist plays an active role in the process of educating responsible citizens and helps them discover the foundation underpinning moral values. *Core Curriculum* stipulates that religion classes should cover issues related to the legal responsibility of minors, with special emphasis on "behaviours related to psychological (…) violence (as well as) the advantages and threats of using online resources"[40]. It seems that the explicit juxtaposition of these two issues is not accidental and points to a real threat present in virtual reality. It is undeniably the threat of falsity, which often bears the hallmarks of psychological violence. The consequences of such actions often prove not only painful but even tragic, particularly for adolescents. Therefore, the catechists should draw the students' attention not only to the legal responsibility of minors but also to the consequences of their actions for others and for their own conscience. However, to limit that formation to school lessons would be a mistake. After all, sensitivity to the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue should be developed primarily in the bosom of the family. The goal of both religious education and family life education is to prepare students for making life decisions and for the responsible fulfilment of their family roles. For this reason, authors of the document (as part of the correlation between religious education and family life education) point to "the education for (…) truth in the family"[41] and its importance for the catechised who, in the near future, will take up the role of parents themselves.

Secondary school is an identity-forming phase and the start of the students' path towards independence. The authors of *Core Curriculum* indicate that the young feel like adults and expect to be treated as such, but simultaneously require assistance as they are still unable to tackle many problems on their own. One of the traits that dominate this stage in life is defiance, which often manifests as recalcitrance towards parents and educators. However, we should remember that adolescents are invariably on the lookout for suitable role models. Young people "spend a lot of time in the online world (…) that promotes their idols, whose life and behaviour oftentimes stand in stark opposition to the teachings of the Church"[42]. For this reason, catechists and all educators must recognise the fact that the modern formation of the young generation takes place in online reality. That is why it seems so important to imbue the students with a sensitivity towards deceptive comportment often exhibited by YouTubers, influencers, etc. That assumption

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38 CC, 72.

39 CC, 72.

40 CC, 87.

41 CC, 90.

42 CC, 98.

correlates directly with one of the attitudes that the students should develop in the course of religious education, i.e. the ability to seek the truth[43].

What seems particularly important in our research context is that the contents of moral formation include the premises for freedom – which should arise from "the pursuit of truth and goodness"[44]. Such a line of reasoning leads to certain assumptions regarding the existence of objective truth in the life of individuals and communities, as well as to the development of attitudes marked with an awareness of risks posed by the negation of the "objective truth"[45]. The later part, also discussing moral formation, refers directly to the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue. The description of the curricular matters contains the presumptions of "living in truth"[46], with the following content recommendations: "witnesses to the life in truth: famous figures and saints; responsible use of the media; an offence against the Eighth Commandment"[47]. These contents are further elaborated in detailed requirements, which include the definition of truth and perjury; Jesus' teaching on oaths; discrepancies in the interpretation of the Eighth Commandment in the Old and the New Testament; examples of people who gave their lives for the truth; the destructive effects of lying; the role of the media and the principles of their use; the importance of morality in the reception of media reports; the evaluation of content provided in the media in the context of the Commandment. Indubitably, such a detailed account of the requirements leads to a concretisation of attitudes which directly concern the topic discussed herein. Therefore, the authors recommend the fostering of the following attitudes: truthfulness; responsibility for words; informed and moderate use of the mass media; evaluation of the received content; rejection of behaviours detrimental to truth; refraining from a breach of confidence[48].

The recommended conditions and modes for the organisation of religious education at secondary schools contain an important note that "a special place should be granted to living in truth and freedom in accord with the Gospel, the formation of conscience and education for love"[49]. Additionally, the authors pointed to the activity of the young in cyberspace, the options for showing students valuable contents available online and the operation of websites and portals which conform to Catholic values. Simultaneously, the authors recommended religion teachers to raise the sensitivity of the catechised to real threats (including spiritual threats) present in the virtual world[50]. The topic resurfaces as the authors describe the correlation between religious education and two other subjects to remark on "behavioural addictions, including addiction to the computer, the Internet

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43 CC, 101.

44 CC, 109.

45 CC, 109.

46 CC, 114.

47 CC, 114.

48 CC, 114–115.

49 CC, 123.

50 CC, 123.

(…)"[51] and threats related to sexual pressure, pornography, juvenile prostitution or exhibitionism widespread on the Internet"[52].

Recent years have brought undeniable advancements in the domain of special pedagogy, which, in turn, inspired growth in the ecclesial and social awareness. People with disabilities have the right of catechesis since they are called to salvation and participate in Christian life by virtue of baptism. The family, the school and the Church all have the means and the knowledge necessary to catechise those with disabilities in line with their requirements and needs. For that reason, it is a matter of course that *Core Curriculum* contains a chapter on special needs schools.

The introduction refers to the concept of school-based catechesis for people with various types of disabilities. One of its aims would be to prepare the students for community life. The concept rests on the belief that interpersonal relationships should be founded on "fraternity, truth and love"[53], which is a clear declaration that people with intellectual disabilities are also called to live in truth and avoid falsehood. Therefore, the scope of catechetical tasks in the scope of moral formation was expanded to include the need to instil in children the character of "truthfulness and honesty"[54]. Those passages clearly reveal that the aim of religious education for students with intellectual disabilities is the character-building that will allow them to grow in the sanctity of life. Depending on the level of intellectual disability displayed by the catechized, the teachers should organise the instruction and adjust working methods in a way that supports students' development, fosters their sensitivity to the need for truth and equips them with the ability to recognise falsity which they will encounter in their lives.

To summarise the precepts of *Core Curriculum* on special needs schools on the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue, we should appreciate the explicit references to the need for living in truth, which does not exclude people with disabilities. However, the document blatantly overlooks the issue of virtual reality. The authors may have assumed that students with severe or profound intellectual disability are not users of digital devices. However, the curriculum also concerns the students displaying mild or moderate levels of disability. These people use information and communication technologies, as confirmed by not only observations but also the existence of applications designed specifically for the disabled, e.g. SelFind[55], Dromnibus[56], TIM[57] and the increasingly frequent use of edu-

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51 Curricular recommendations provided for the correlation of religious education with safety education. CC, 135.

52 Curricular recommendations provided for the correlation of religious education with family life education. CC, 135.

53 CC, 141.

54 CC, 154.

55 SelFind has three applications: Daily Plan, S.O.S, Safe Journey, each used by two people: the person with an intellectual disability and their guardian. See: access 14.12.2020, http://selfind.pl.

56 Dromnibus is a multimedia tool which complements therapy of children with autism, contributing to the acquisition of necessary skills, and supporting development. See: access 14.12.2020, https://www.dromnibus.com/pl/produkt.

57 TIM allows people with disabilities to communicate, learn, pursue their hobbies and spend time in a more exciting manner, while giving them a sense of autonomy and independence. See: access 14.12.2020, https://www.tim-aac.com.

cational tools such as iPad which may be equipped with software dedicated to children with disability certificates[58].

3. Catechetical conclusions and postulates

In conclusion, it should be noted that the analysis of *Directory for Catechesis* and *The Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* performed herein does not represent an exhaustive account of the role of school-based religious education in the process of students' formation for living in truth, both in the real and the virtual reality. In order to provide a broader and more exhaustive take on the problem, we should conduct an analysis of religious education syllabi, methodology textbooks for the catechists, religious education textbooks and the latest catechetical literature. Furthermore, a study of religious education teachers is necessary to present their level of awareness and the potential role they could play in educating Internet users in sensitivity to the truth. I believe it worthwhile to question the catechists on the following matters: Do they cover the research problem in their class? If so, to what extent? Is the research problem sufficiently discussed in textbooks and methodology aids? What is the attitude of students to the research problem? Is there a potential for effective formation in this regard? To present the full picture, there is also a need for research conducted among the catechised. Students should be asked about their awareness of the threats and consequences of an offence against the Eighth Commandment in the context of online activity. Have they discussed such topics during school time and school-based religion classes? Do they see technical means and methods for the protection of themselves and their peers against the flood of falsity and manipulation of the truth encountered on the Internet?

The analysis of the selected contents – the *Directory* and *Core Curriculum* – allows establishing that both documents make frequent references to the preparation for living in truth and to the online activity of students. However, it should be emphasised that, with one exception[59], these topics are uncorrelated and discussed in separation. It appears that with regard to the essence of the problem – the need to educate students for truth, in virtual reality and otherwise – the documents fail to explicitly juxtapose the two topics. The assumption that target readers, including not only the authors of textbooks and curricula but primarily the catechists themselves, have a free hand in linking the issues, does not justify the lack of clear guidelines. It appears that a juxtaposition of these contents combined with a broad explanation could improve the efficacy of school-based religion classes in the formation of youth regarding the research problem.

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58 Beata Bilicka, Michał Gurzyński, *iPad na szkolnych lekcjach religii* [*The iPad during school-based religion classes*] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2020), 109; Jolanta Majkowska, "iPad w terapii dzieci niepełnosprawnych intelektualnie" ["The iPad in the therapy of intellectually disabled children"], *Super belfrzy* 18.07.2016, access 21.12.2020, http://www.superbelfrzy.edu.pl/glowna/ipad-w-terapii-dzieci-niepelnosprawnych-intelektualnie.

59 See: contents, particular requirements, and attitudes of secondary school students. CC, 114–115.

In the scope of the research problem discussed herein, the greatest oversight is the failure to consider the use of information and communication technologies by students enrolled in special needs schools. It is difficult to justify the non-inclusion of a reality that involves a large part of the students. Let us note that digital technology not only provides people with disabilities with Internet access, but also supports their development, education, and therapy. IT tools are exceptionally effective and may provide a response to the social and ecclesial marginalisation of the people pushed to the sidelines because of various disabilities. At this point, we should postulate not only to add content on the matter to catechetical documents but also to create religious applications and methodology aids for catechesis. These tools should be based on the latest technological solutions and customised to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

Summary

The consequence of living in truth is an aspiration to devote one's life to the truth. Saint John Paul II has reiterated on multiple occasions that there is no freedom without truth. For to enjoy authentic freedom is to live in a world of true values and to bear witness to these values, wherever we are. The principle applies to reality and virtual reality alike. The educators: parents, teachers, catechists and priests face a mission which commands them to set requirements for the formation for truth – first, to themselves, and then – to their wards. One of the aims of religious education is to protect the catechised against the manipulation from the hands of people who use lies and half-truths but are frequently regarded by students as role-models and authority figures. The point is not to start an ideological war on the virtual world but to raise the sensitivity of the students, offer them a chance to learn the truth, and primarily – to help them choose the One who is the truth[60]. The presented conclusions can become an inspiration for the authors of the future versions of catechetical documents, religious education syllabi and religious education textbooks. They may also prove useful for religious education teachers and all the people concerned for educating the young generation in the truth.

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