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Religiosity among retired teachers

Religijność emerytowanych nauczycieli

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Słowa kluczowe: religijność, nauczyciel, osoba starsza

Abstract

The article investigates the issue of religiosity among retired teachers. The areas of particular interest include their everyday participation in rituals, ceremonies and religious practices, which are analyzed within the functional approach to religiosity. The article presents the results of a survey conducted among 381 retired teachers from South Poland, who answered a questionnaire used in cross-cultural gerontological research. The conclusion discusses respondents' religiosity with reference to the function of religion and socio-cultural changes.

Streszczenie

W prezentowanym artykule przedmiotem zainteresowań uczyniono religijność emerytowanych nauczycieli. W celu rozpoznania jak ona przejawia się w codziennych rytuałach, obrzędach i praktykach religijnych w odniesieniu

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do funkcjonalnego ujęcia religijności, podjęto próbę rozpoznania religijności emerytowanych nauczycieli w wymienionych aspektach. Przedstawiono wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród 381 emerytowanych nauczycieli zamieszkujących Polskę Południową. W badaniach posłużono się kwestionariuszem ankiety do międzykulturowych badań gerontologicznych. W konkluzjach określono religijność badanych w odniesieniu do funkcji religii oraz przemian społeczno-kulturowych.

1. Introduction

According to W. Pawluczuk, religion is the element which connects the picture of the world with everyday life. It is a complex concept, developed mostly within the context of the European culture and thus difficult to apply to non-European cultures, especially ancient ones (Pawluczuk 1990, 16-18). In 1967 Peter Berger defined religion as a 'sacred canopy' (Berger 2005). In the past this 'canopy' was stretched over all forms of human activity, both individual and collective. In the individual dimension, for some people religion can be the source of meaning for their whole lives, while for others it represents only a cultural value (Borowik 2013, 439-450). For the former, religion and faith and the transcendence resulting from them influence human life and human activities and allow people to categorise these activities into moral and immoral ones (Pawluczuk 1990). According to religious thinking, which is tinged with transcendence, moral acts "are guided by obligations resulting from 'higher necessities', while immoral acts result from untamed, 'wild' nature and the lack of such obligations" (Pawluczuk 1990). The idea of transcendence can become the idea which unites the agent and the world (the idea which infuses meaning to the world) if it is the live idea of faith. The live idea of faith for practicing believers is revealed mostly in mystical situations typical both for everyday life, such as daily prayer, discussions on religious topics, reading religious books and reflecting on religious matters, and for holy days of obligation, such as the Eucharist or Mass. Irena Borowik notices that attuning the situation will find its expression either as fascination and awe (experiencing sacrum) or

solemnity and gravity (ultimate things, the meaning of life) (Borowik 1990, 123).

Studying religiosity – as Mariański stresses – is not easy, because, when it is understood as a transcendent event, it cannot be analyzed in the social dimension. However, it can be analyzed from the sociological perspective because religion is incorporated into human reality through rituals, beliefs, language and institutions (Mariański 2004). The article focuses on retired teachers' perspective on the functions of religion, its significance and transformations of religiosity as a response to socio-cultural changes. Thus, the functional perspective is the leading approach to religiosity adopted in the article.

2. Theoretical framework of the study

Religiosity can be analyzed from either the substantive or functional perspective, and this study is based on the latter. The main representatives of the functional approach include Bellah, Geertz, Glock, Luckmann, Luhman, Parsons, Berger and Durkheim (Mariański 2004; see also: Piwowarski 2007). Sociology of religion offers numerous functional definitions of religion, e.g. facing 'ultimate problems' (e.g. Yinger), the ability of the human body to transcend its biological nature through constructing moral frames and all-encompassing structures of meanings (Luckmann) (Robertson 2011), or the highest and the most general level of culture (e.g. Parsons and Bellah), which is based on the assumption that in every system of human activity individuals are placed under control of the cultural system of beliefs, values and symbols. The cultural system provides guidance for human activities, and, at its most general level, 'justifies meanings', which is usually described as the sphere of religious values and beliefs.

I. Borowik defines religiosity as "various contents and forms in which a basic subjective conviction that the meaning of human life goes beyond its biological existence manifests itself" (Borowik 2001, 61). Religion is always someone's. It is a subjective dimension of the functioning of

religion in a community or in an individual and denotes the attitude towards religion typical of a particular individual, social group or period of time (Borowik 2001, 61). As far as the contents of religiosity are concerned, according to I. Borowik, they are convictions of the nature of the world, human beings, their goals and destiny, moral norms, etc., which are acquired through an individual quest and culturally transmitted. The forms of religiosity are activities conditioned by assumed convictions, revealing themselves in possessing and manifesting attachment to symbols, in performing rituals and practices, and in belonging to a community (Borowik 2001, 61ff).

Glock and Stark (1965) identified five dimensions of religiosity from the perspective of its form:

1. The ritualistic dimension refers to religious practices. It embraces everything people do to express their religious involvement. These practices can be divided into two groups: ceremonies (a set of public rituals and formal acts, such as attending Mass) and devotional practices (personal and informal acts of cult and contemplation, such as praying or reading the Holy Scriptures).
2. The ideological dimension refers to a set of convictions held by a religious person regarding the nature of God, human being and the world, which are characteristic for a given religious group.
3. The experiential dimension is connected with religious experiences.
4. The intellectual dimension refers to religious knowledge.
5. The consequential dimension refers to practical applications of faith, knowledge, practices, and experiences in relations with other people, and through them, with God.

The dimension important for the study is the ritualistic dimension (Glock and Stark 1965), as the religiosity (Pawluczuk 1990) of retired teachers is understood here as convictions and behaviours motivated by

religion, which are typical of a given age group⁴. The religiosity of senior citizens differs from the religiosity of younger people, , the same is also true of the degree of their religious involvement (cf. Woźniak 2015, 24).

According to J. Mariański, every religion is embedded in a given socio-cultural context (Mariański 2008), which means that the analysis of religiosity of particular age groups should take this context into account. Religiosity is influenced by numerous social factors, including: the type of society, the level of pluralism of norms and values, religious homogeneity, the economic and political situation, a combination of historical and cultural factors characteristic for a country/region, the traditions of a region and the nature of local communities in the place of their residence (cf. Robertson 2011; Mariański 2004). These factors have been taken into consideration in this study. Bearing in mind the fact that the permanence of Polish religiosity is conditioned by the national character of Catholicism, which is tinged with folklore, ritualism (cf. Łukasik 2013), religious nationalism and a strong opposition against communist totalitarianism (Borowik 2013), these features should also be taken into account while investigating the religiosity of retired teachers. Additionally, the historical period during which their religiosity was shaped seems an important factor: the respondents personally experienced such significant historical phenomena in Polish history as several dozens of years in a totalitarian system, which actively fought against religion, and the political transformation. Outside the socio-cultural dimension, other important factors include the place of birth, the level of religiosity in the biological family, the level of education or meaningful events (personal or social) (cf. Woźniak 2012, 207-242; Woźniak and Zawisza 2012, 279-309).

⁴ An interesting study on spirituality and religiosity among adolescents in view of their job preferences was conducted by Janusz Surzykiewicz (Surzykiewicz 2016).

3. Methodology of the study

The research presented in this article is a part of a larger research conducted by Katarzyna Jagielska, PhD, on the quality of life of retired teachers, the article investigates only the area of religiosity, including the criterion of the respondents' age.

In order to explore the above-mentioned aspects of religiosity, the study was conducted among 381 teachers from southern Poland. It is worth mentioning that they belong to the Dioceses of Tarnów and Kraków which are the most religious dioceses in Poland, with the greatest numbers of practicing Catholics (CBOS 2009). It will be valuable to discover whether retired teachers from the study are typical representatives of their dioceses or whether their religiosity is different.

The study focuses on teachers' religiosity and its aim is to explore what it is, how intense it is, how it is expressed, and what role it plays in their lives. The main research problem is contained in the question: What is the level of religiosity of retired teachers?

The study is based on a survey (Babbie 2006, 159), namely, a questionnaire used in cross-cultural gerontological research developed by the Institute of Gerontology at Heidelberg University, which was translated into Polish and culturally adapted to suit the Polish conditions by the Department of Clinical and Social Gerontology at the Medical University of Białystok (Halicka 2004, 386-403). The study was conducted between January and September 2016. Its description focuses on presenting general tendencies characteristic for all respondents.

4. Religiosity of retired teachers

Assuming that religiosity encompasses various contents and forms of manifesting the conviction that the meaning of life does not end with its biological existence, the study focuses mainly on forms, i.e., performing religious practices and rituals (cf. Borowik 1990). Practices typical of everyday life include: daily prayers, singing religious songs, reading the

Holy Scriptures, discussing religious matters, reading religious books, participating in religious services, and attending Mass. The first five are examples of devotional practices, while the last two of ceremonies (cf. Borowik 1990).

It is interesting to examine how often retired teachers participate in ceremonies and rituals and what meaning they assign to them. Figure 1 demonstrates the frequency with which they attend Mass and pray individually.

The data presented in Figure 1 reveal that the majority of teachers attend Mass once a week (53,06% of all respondents) and several times a week (19,17% of all respondents). Differences are visible when we take into consideration the respondents' age. Attending Mass once a week is the most common among teachers aged 65-74 (56,80%) and 75 or over (51,76%). 48,11% of teachers aged 55-64 attend Mass once a week and 25,47% of them – several times a week. In the remaining age groups, 17,65% of teachers aged 75 or over attend Mass several times a week, and 15,98% aged 65-74. It should be noted that the group of the oldest respondents is the most numerous with regards to people who go to church less often than once a month (11,76%) and never (4,71%). This result might be explained by their deteriorating health and historical aspects connected with post-war ideology and the attempts of the Polish authorities to introduce total secularisation.

Apart from attending Masses or other church services, it is important for religious persons to engage in individual religious practices, such as personal individual prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, contemplating, etc. Prayer is the time of celebrating the presence of God with a human being and the presence of a human being with God. It is born out of faith, and it strengthens faith. Trusting and persistent prayer has great power – it changes a person (cf. *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego* 1994, 475ff). Figure 2 presents the level of retired teachers' religiosity measured by their individual religious practices.

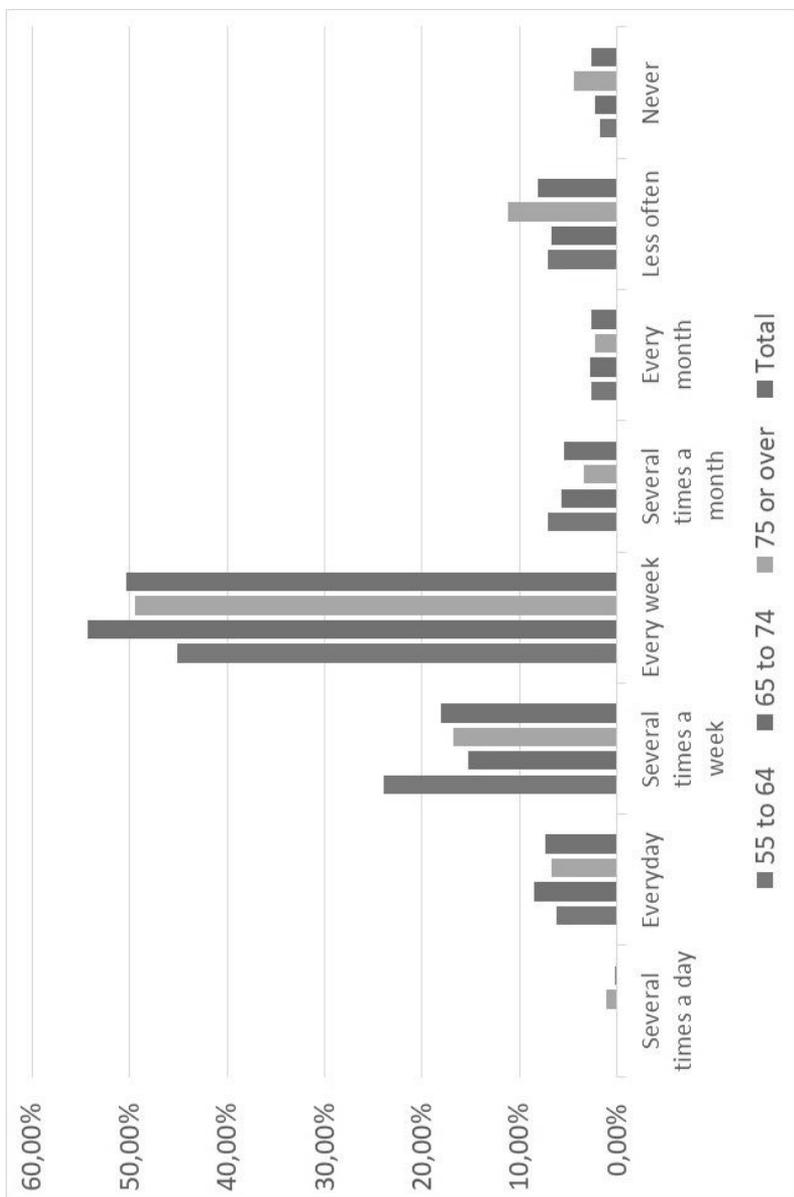


Figure 1. The frequency of attending Mass with reference to the respondents' age. Source: own research of Katarzyna Jagielska (2019).

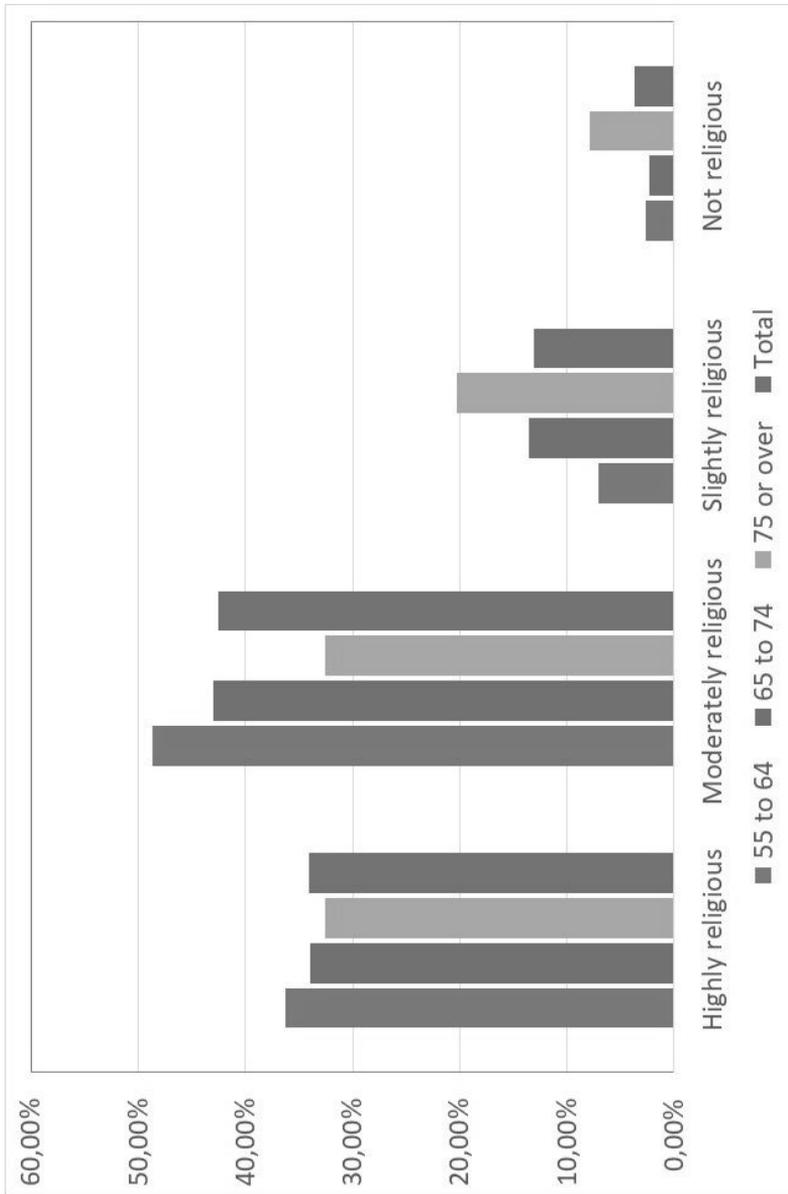


Figure 2. The level of religiosity measured by individual religious practices. Source: own research of Katarzyna Jagielska (2019).

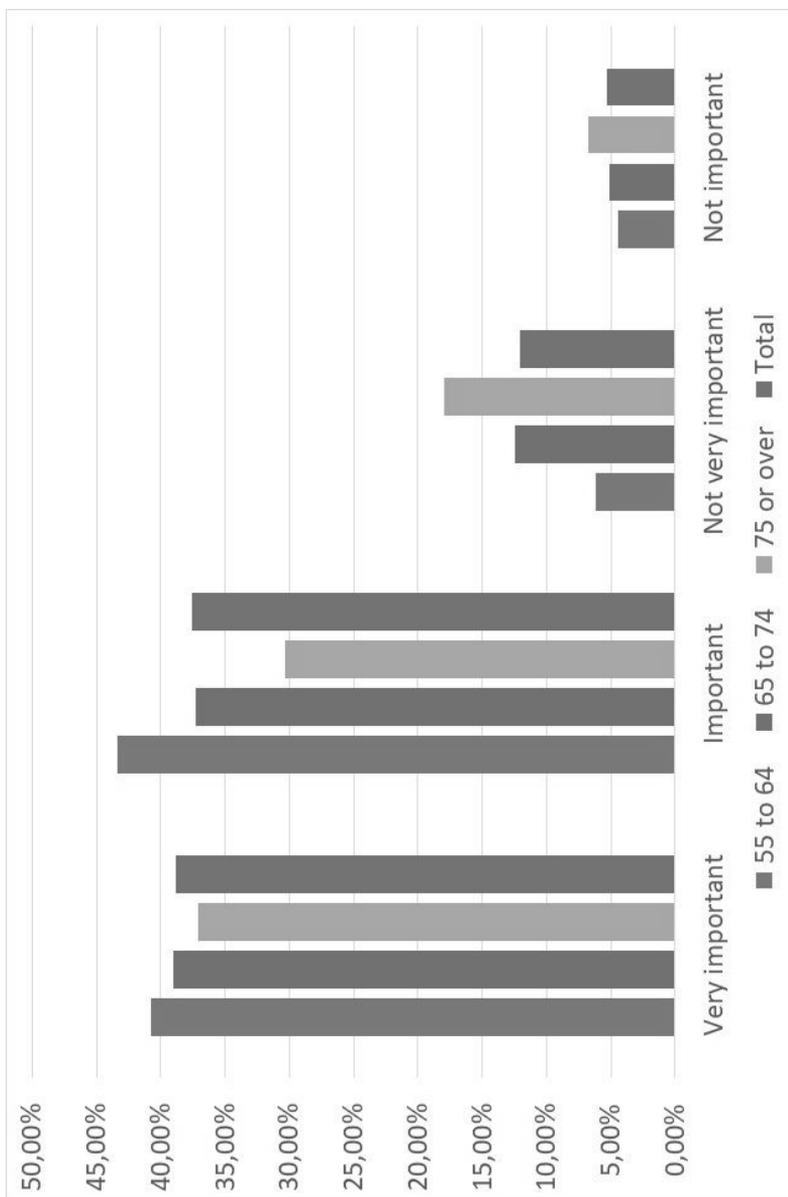


Figure 3. The importance of religion for retired teachers. Source: own research of Katarzyna Jagielska (2019).

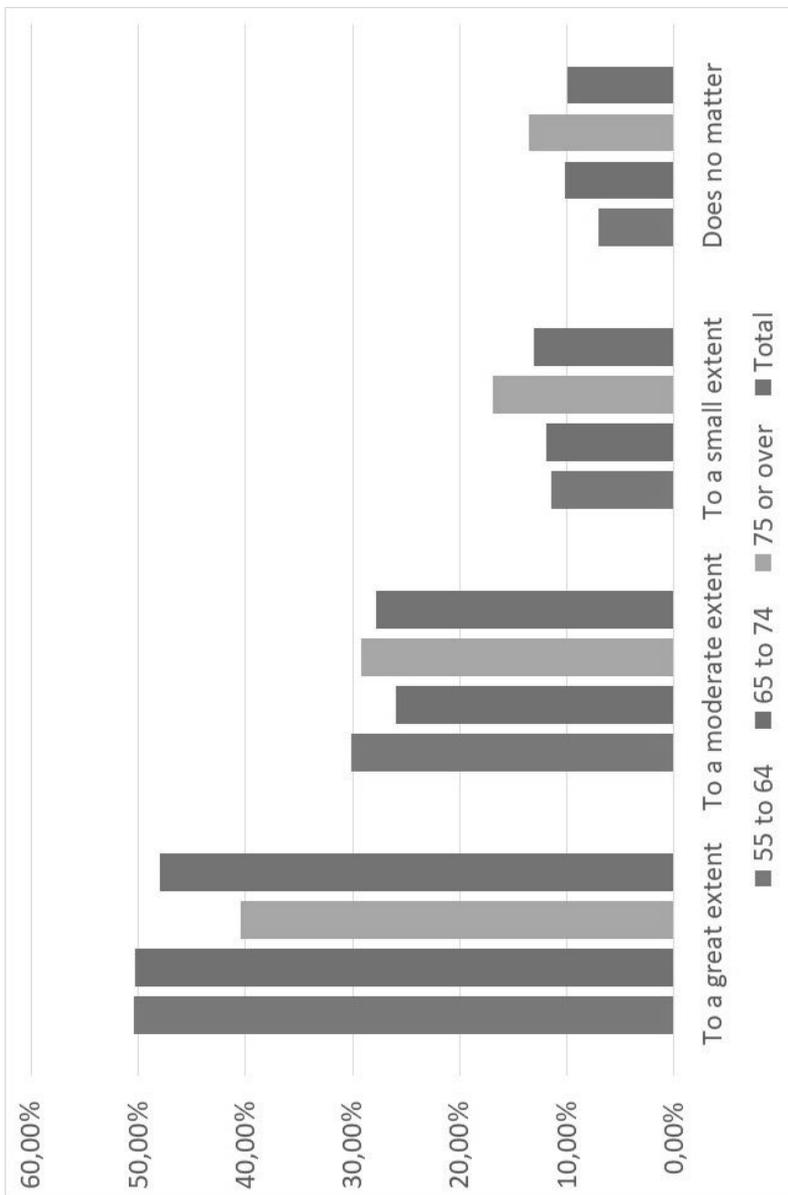


Figure 4. Religion as a source of strength, hope and consolation. Source: own research of Katarzyna Jagielska (2019).

Analyzing data from Figure 2, it can be noticed that almost half of the respondents (45,20%) describe their religiosity measured by their individual practices as moderately religious and highly religious (36,72%). It is worth noticing that the majority of teachers from the age group 55-64 are moderately religious (38,32%) and highly religious (38,32%), while only few of them are not religious and slightly religious. The same percentage (34,94%) of the oldest respondents (75 and over) are highly and moderately religious, and most of them, in comparison to other age groups, are not religious (8,43%) and slightly religious (21,69%). As with the previous question (regarding attending Mass), the oldest teachers rarely engage in individual religious practices, and one third of them do not engage in them at all. Attending Mass may be connected with health, but this is not the case with individual practices which can be undertaken at home at any time (or at certain set hours, e.g., the Breviary, the Angelus or the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy). The explanation most probably lies in their all-life religiosity and indoctrination they were exposed to while obtaining teaching qualifications in their youth.

For practicing believers, religion is of great importance, which is reflected in their lifestyle and the way of life, their attitude to other people, and their perception of the meaning of life, etc. To discover the importance of religion in respondents' lives, they were asked to state it on a 1 to 4 scale. The results are given in Figure 3.

For most respondents, religion is very important (41,69%) and important (40,00%). When we analyze the data taking into consideration their age, we can notice certain differences. For teachers aged 55-64 religion is important (54,79%) and very important (42,99%), and only for a small group not very important and not important. For one fourth of the oldest teachers, it is not very important (19,51%) or not important (7,32%). A relatively high percentage of teachers for whom religion is not of great value can be found in the age group 65-74 (not very important 13,25% and not important 5,42%). These results confirm earlier findings

regarding the religiosity of retired teachers measured by attending Mass and engaging in individual practices.

For believers, religion and faith are a source of strength necessary for coping with life, setting goals, making choices and taking responsibility for them, as well as the source of hope and consolation (Pikuła 2015). Leszek Kołakowski notices that in the Polish culture “there is a need for faith as the way of explaining being and trust in being” (Kołakowski 2011, 78). The respondents also answered a question connected with this dimension of religion, and their answers are presented in Figure 4.

The data presented in Figure 4 indicates that to a great and moderate extent religion serves as a source of strength, hope and consolation for retired teachers aged 55-64 (respectively: 50,89% and 30,36%). Also, to a great extent it serves this function for 51,15% of teachers aged of 65-74 and for 40,45 % of teachers aged 75 and over. 16,85% of the oldest respondents think that religion is a source of strength, hope and consolation to a small extent (16,85%), while for 13,48% of them it does not matter at all. Such answers given by the oldest teachers, which are consistent with the results obtained for previous aspects of religiosity, are conditioned historically.

Discussion of the results: The study reveals the picture of religiosity of retired teachers conditioned by historical and social transformations in post-war Poland. Taking these transformations into consideration, we can indicate three periods in which the respondents obtained their teaching qualifications, which most probably influenced their religiosity. Teachers aged 75 and over obtained their teaching qualifications right after the war, at the end of the 40s and the beginning of the 50s, which is now reflected in their most diverse level of religiosity (the numbers of religious and non-religious people in this age group are similar). While obtaining their teaching qualifications, they were exposed to the most intense ideologization and indoctrination, because they were being prepared to educate young people in a manner that corresponded

to the greatest extent to communist ideals. The total secularization of Poland after the war, indoctrination in education and traumatic war experiences, which might have strengthened the teachers' conviction that there is no God, might be the reasons why they describe themselves as non-religious persons, not engaged in religion in any dimension (ritualistic, ideological, experiential, intellectual nor consequential). Moreover, another factor conditioning their low religiosity is the fact that teachers of that age group were led to work at school by the so-called "a work order". As a consequence, people derived from a particular region of Poland (for example Lesser Poland, the most religious region of Poland) were commonly directed to work in all the regions, except their own. Such actions – directing the most ideologically radical teachers to the most religious regions – were made to cause interference in tradition, culture and religiosity of people of particular regions. The religiosity of teachers at the age 65-74 is different. When we look for the determinants of their religiosity in socio-historical transformations which took place in Poland, it should be noticed that they obtained their teaching qualifications between 1956 and the beginning of 1970s, i.e., in times of the so called 'thaw'. Then, despite still present indoctrination and secularization, national and Catholic movements and the activity of the Church, including Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's work, started to play a much greater role than before. They were the factors which directed Poles' thoughts to freedom and new national identity, and which led to the increase of religiosity among people in this age group. The respondents aged 65-74 most frequently attend Mass once a week (ceremonies) and more frequently than other age groups engage in individual religious practices (devotional practices), which might also stem from their youth experiences. In the youngest respondents' (55-64) youth, they had a chance to take part in actions against the authorities, regime, communism, (strikes). The period when they obtained their teaching qualifications was characterised by the active presence of opposing trade union and student movements, strongly supported by the

Catholic Church, which, at that time, offered the only space for liberation ideas and movements. Electing a Pole, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the Pope was the crowning moment of this period. Thus, it can be assumed that teachers from this age group are the most religious because of their strong links with the Catholic Church and active participation in activities opposing communism. Their religiosity is revealed in all aspects investigated in this study: ceremonies, i.e. participation in religious rituals (most respondents from this age group attend Mass on Sundays but also go to church on other days of the week), devotional practices (involvement in individual prayer), and ideological and consequential dimensions: for them religion is reflected in the form and content of life and is conducive to leading a life according to its commandments, and is also a source of hope, consolation and strength (cf. Halicka, Halicki 2002; Borowik 1990; Borowik 2002).

When the age of the respondents is taken into consideration, the religiosity of teachers who took part in the study turns out to be different from religiosity described by I. Borowik (Borowik, 2013), in the sense that the oldest respondents from our study do not link religiosity with their approaching death: they do not engage in religious practices (individually or in a group) in preparation for the end of life (it refers to about 30% respondents). It can be noticed that the religiosity of the retired teachers is conditioned by social and ideological transformations, historical events and educational tendencies prevalent during their educational process. As Krause (2003) observes, although the majority of studies on senior citizens confirm the increase in their religiosity with age, hasty and inaccurate conclusions that religiosity always increases with age should not be drawn. Instead of saying that religiosity increases with time, that is also with age, further studies should be undertaken on particular age groups which will take into account socio-cultural, historical and socio-demographic factors (Halicka, Halicki 2002). Some researchers notice a growing differentiation of patterns of religious involvement among the elderly (Nelskon, Dannefer 1992; Bahr 1970).

Our study indicates that teachers' religiosity is not shaped by their age or place of living (the fact that they live in the most religious dioceses), but by their participation in ideological and social transformations – which was pointed out by Idler (Idler 1994) - and the historical period in which they obtained their teaching qualifications.

5. Conclusion

According to a commonly held view, people become more religious with age (Halicka, Halicki, 2002). The results of the study conducted among Polish senior citizens explicitly demonstrate that senior citizens display greater religious involvement than other age groups. However, the main factors taken into consideration in previous studies from this area included socio-economic factors, such as the level of education and the place of birth (Halicka, Halicki 2002; Pędich 2002). When the analysis is extended by additional factors, including the ones from social, historical and cultural areas, the picture of religiosity among senior citizens changes and no longer follows the global tendencies which state that religiosity increases with age or is conditioned by the place of residence (in villages and towns religiosity is greater than in big cities). Thus, in researching religiosity it is important to remember that not only the demographic factors matter, but also that social, cultural (Mariański 2008) and historical ones should be taken into consideration.

The presented results of the study imply several indications for educational practice in two main areas:

- preparation for work with the elderly of formal and informal assistants in following scope: sensitivity to the spiritual and religious needs of the older people in the context of reflectivity on their own life; awareness of the sense of passing of life; the meaning of recent achievements, life accomplishments in the context of death, balance of life and giving sense, value or importance to previous accomplishments; defining life goals and opportunities for their achievement by the elderly, as well as

explaining the passing of life, human's death in the perspective of spiritual and religious values,

- education of the elderly with particular emphasis on: sensitization and development of higher needs, including spiritual needs and showing their sense and meaning for human life and passing his life as well as death; help in giving meaning to people's own life (making sense of life) according to plans, life goals and in an endeavor to find fulfillment and be a happy man, facing the end of human life and death and also often unavoidable pain and suffering (as studies confirm, people who are religious and giving value and sense to spiritual life, give also meaning to the passing of human life, understand death more easily and accept death as a natural stage of life).

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