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## Empirical research as an area of research activity of Polish catechetical experts

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ANNA ZELLMAN\*

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AS AN AREA OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY OF POLISH CATECHETICAL EXPERTS

Apart from theoretical analyses, contemporary Polish catechetics refers to practice<sup>1</sup>. Researchers verify catechetical concepts, theories and models that have been used so far, and elaborate new solutions resulting from social and cultural and educational conditions<sup>2</sup>. This research activity is characterised by the diversity of content<sup>3</sup>.

In connection with the above, it seems justified to present the research activity that Polish catechetical experts conduct in the field of empirical research. In order to fulfil this aim, it is necessary to pay attention to the research methods, techniques and tools preferred in Polish catechetics, i.e. to present methodological elements. These data will be supplemented by a synthetic description of environments in which empirical research is conducted most frequently. Then, we will focus on the content of this research. Specific research topics will be presented along with references to publications containing detailed analyses. In the conclusion of this paper the need to enrich the current scope of research activity will be highlighted.

### Empirical research in Polish faculties of theology

Catechetics is a subdiscipline of practical theology<sup>4</sup>. The scope of its research includes scientific reflections on integral catechetics<sup>5</sup>. This, in turn, de-

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., a list of publications in: R. Czekalski (ed.), *Bibliografia katechetyczna 2001-2010*, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> For more details on this subject, see, e.g.: K. Misiaszek, *Status metodologiczny teologii katechetycznej (katechetyki)*, in: *Metodologia teologii praktycznej*, ed. W. Przychyna, Kraków 2011, pp. 85-94.

termines the methods of becoming familiar with various aspects of integral catechetics, the verification of theories, and the construction and implementation of new solutions<sup>6</sup>. The leading theological centre in which a series of empirical studies was carried out is the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). In the years 1970-2010, in the Institute of Pastoral Theology of KUL, students of catechetics conducted empirical research on various topics under the direction of Rev. Prof. Mieczysław Majewski and Rev. Prof. Stanisław Kulpaczyński<sup>7</sup>. Data acquired by them were used for the elaboration of the topics of a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation. It is important to mention the outstanding contribution of Rev. Prof. Stanisław Kulpaczyński, who regarded empirical research as an important part of his research activity. Under his direction, a series of theoretical and empirical works was written at a scientific seminar<sup>8</sup>. Currently, empirical research is occasionally conducted under the direction of Rev. Andrzej Kiciński, Rev. Paweł Mąkosza and Rev. Marian Zajac<sup>9</sup>. The results of this research will be made available in publications<sup>10</sup>.

Empirical research was occasionally conducted at the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw (now the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw). This research was carried out mainly in connection with the elaboration of the subject-matter of a master's thesis<sup>11</sup>. A similar level of research activity in the field of empirical research can be observed at other faculties of theology in Poland (e.g., at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, at the University of Opole, at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw). For example, research was conducted under the direction of Rev. Radosław Chalupniak, Elżbieta Osewska and Rev. Jan Szpet. The aim of this research is to elaborate the subject-matter of a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation<sup>12</sup>. Sometimes its results are made

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<sup>5</sup> For more details about this, see, e.g.: M. Majewski, *Fundamentalne zagadnienia katechetyki*, Lublin 1981.

<sup>6</sup> For more details about this, see, e.g.: M. Majewski, *Metodologia katechetyki w teorii i w praktyce*, Kraków 1998.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed and competent coverage of this research, see: S. Kulpaczyński, *Nurt badań empirycznych Kulowskiej katechetyki (1970-2010)*, „Roczniki Pastoralno-Katechetyczne” 58 (2011) vol. 3, pp. 279-306.

<sup>8</sup> Detailed analyses on that subject were undertaken by A. Piwowar in: *Wkład Księdza Profesora Stanisława Kulpaczyńskiego w rozwój katechetyki*, Lublin 2013, pp. 180-185, 331-352.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.katechetyka.eu/prace-magisterskie-z-katechetyki,301.html>, online access: 10.05.2015.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., P. Mąkosza, M. Zajac, *Faithfulness to God and to people. Religious education in Poland*, in: *How teachers in Europe teach religion. An international empirical study in 16 countries*, ed. H.G. Ziebertz, U. Riegel, Berlin 2009, pp. 169-180.

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://baza.biblioteka.uksw.edu.pl/makwww/?BM=03>, access: 10.05.2015.

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.bwt.uni.opole.pl/index.php/katalogi>, access: 10.05.2015; <https://teologia.amu.edu.pl/strona-glowna/wt/biblioteka>, access: 10.05.2015; <http://baza.biblioteka.uksw.edu.pl/makwww/?BM=03>, access: 03.09.2015.

available in book publications or papers<sup>13</sup>.

A high level of research activity in the field of empirical research can be observed at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. In the years 1999-2014, on the basis of empirical research, a series of master's theses were written<sup>14</sup>. They were written mainly under the direction of Rev. Wojśław Czupryński and Anna Zellma. These works deal with various aspects of integral catechesis. Apart from that, Anna Zellma undertakes empirical research in various thematic areas in her research activity<sup>15</sup>. She presents the results of her research in her papers<sup>16</sup>.

### Methodological elements of empirical research

Empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts fall within the scope of the paradigm of theological & pastoral analysis elaborated in pastoral theology. Consisting of three stages, this model of research activity is essentially based on deductive inference, where the major premise – the criteriological one – is the teaching of the Church, and the minor premise is formed by the results of empirical research. The final outcome of this inference process consists of proposals for the renewal of Polish catechesis<sup>17</sup>. In the empirical part of this model the following research activities are performed: 1) the formulation and specification of the problem (e.g. the determination of variables, the formulation of research hypotheses, the operationalisation of the subject area of research); 2) the elaboration of relevant research tools or the use of previously constructed tools; 3) the selection of the research sample and the carrying-out of research (pilot research and main research); 4) the verification of gathered research material (the estimation of its value) and the analysis and elaboration of the results of empirical research; 5) the presentation of the correlation of theory (the normative theological model) with practice (respondents' opinions),

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., D. Balcerowska-Noweta, *Katecheza szkolna w świadomości młodzieży klas maturalnych liceów ogólnokształcących w diecezji kaliskiej. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, Poznań 2009; J. Kurosz, *Szkolne nauczanie religii w spotkaniu z duszpasterstwem dzieci i młodzieży. Wyzwania i szanse*, Poznań 2008.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., [http://www.uwm.edu.pl/wt/28,Baza\\_prac\\_\(lic\\_.\\_mgr\\_.\\_dr\\_.\\_dr\\_hab\\_.\).html](http://www.uwm.edu.pl/wt/28,Baza_prac_(lic_._mgr_._dr_._dr_hab_.).html), access: 10.05.2015.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.uwm.edu.pl/ktplik/kadra/anna-zellma>, access: 16.05.2015.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.; cf., e.g., A. Zellma, *Niektóre aspekty katechezy parafialnej w opinii studentów teologii*, in: R. Chałupniak, J. Kocheł, J. Kostorz (ed.), *Katecheza parafialna – reaktywacja. Duszpasterstwo katechetyczne w parafii*, Opole 2006, pp. 173-185; *ibid.*, *Obraz kapłana w wypowiedziach wybranych grup katechizowanej młodzieży (comparative study)*, „Studia Pastoralne” 6 (2010) no. 6, pp. 87-103; *ibid.*, *Wychowanie seksualne w szkole z perspektywy teorii i praktyki katechetycznej*, in: K. Glombik (ed.), *Wychowanie seksualne w rodzinie i w szkole*, Opole 2010, pp. 207-227.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., in: R. Kamiński, *Miejsce teologii pastoralnej w systemie nauk*, „Warszawskie Studia Pastoralne” 2006 no. 3, pp. 143-163; *idem*, *Metoda teologii pastoralnej*, RTK 1990, vol. 6, pp. 93-97. Cf. also: A. Siemianowski, *Ogólna metodologia nauk. Wprowadzenie dla studentów teologii*, Poznań 2001, p. 40.

and the elaboration of conclusions; 6) the final report in scientific work (e.g. the text of a doctoral dissertation, an article, a monograph, etc.)<sup>18</sup>.

As Stanisław Kulpaczyński aptly notes, this research is aimed at answering the question about the current condition of religious instruction, parish catechesis and the formation of religion teachers, and at providing the current opinions of catechised children, young people and adults on the topic specified by the researcher<sup>19</sup>. It is used for the acquisition of data that show the real (actual) condition of integral catechesis in Poland and various dependencies between causes and effects. The results of empirical research are usually utilised in activities aimed at improving catechistic services at school and in the parish.

In connection with the above, Polish catechetical experts conduct empirical research with the use of various methods and research tools. The most frequent method is the survey. The interview, observation and free text methods are also used occasionally. Polish catechetical experts adopt the correct strategy of paying much attention to detailed interpretation, the justification and arrangement of results, the elaboration and quantity & quality analysis of statistical data, and the comparison of acquired data with the theoretical model. On this basis, they make a reliable description enriched with reference to catechetical theory. The research model adopted by Polish catechetical experts testifies to their pluralistic approach to the facts, phenomena and opinions that are of interest of them. It indicates the theoretical & empirical structure of the research being undertaken, and determines the division of each study into three parts: the theoretical (criteriological) part, the empirical (diagnosis) part, and the postulative part containing current conclusions.

Empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts is characterised by the dominance of quantitative & qualitative methodological orientation. Thus, elements of quantitative and qualitative research are present<sup>20</sup>. Quantitative research covers a large number of respondents and refers to mass phenomena (e.g. opinions about the use of marks during religion lessons, the presence of religion lessons in schools)<sup>21</sup>. There is no room for a deeper analysis of relations between particular facts. The results of this research are subjected to mathematical and statistical analyses. Qualitative research makes it possible to provide a more detailed analysis of recognised phenomena. The aim of researchers is to understand the phenomenon under analysis<sup>22</sup>. Data acquired in

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<sup>18</sup> W. Przygoda, *Paradygmat postępowania badawczego w teologii praktycznej*, in: *Metodologia teologii praktycznej*, pp. 97-113; cf. T. Bauman (ed.), *Praktyka badań pedagogicznych*, Kraków 2013; T. Pilch, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 171-202.

<sup>19</sup> S. Kulpaczyński, *Nurt badań empirycznych Kulowskiej katechetyki (1970-2010)*, pp. 279-280.

<sup>20</sup> For more details on this topic, see, e.g.: T. Pilch, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych: strategie ilościowe i jakościowe*, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>21</sup> For more details about this, see, e.g.: M. Łobocki, *Wprowadzenie do metodologii badań pedagogicznych*, Kraków 2009.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

the course of qualitative research have a preliminary diagnostic value. Broad generalisations should not be made on their basis, because the research sample is not a representative one. Empirical data obtained in the course of qualitative research are usually subjected to the secondary standardisation process, which makes it possible to build scales, perform measurements and find new impulses for quantitative & qualitative research. The acquired data are used, among other things, for the construction of hypotheses that can be verified in representative research<sup>23</sup>. Qualitative research enriches the state of catechetical knowledge based on standardised research, because it exemplifies regularities described in the theory of catechesis or shows new areas of changes with regard to school and parish catechesis. Thus, combining quantitative research with qualitative research seems to be justified within the scope of one project and research tool. This allows us not only to become familiar with the phenomenon explored by the researcher, but also to understand the issue and describe it more thoroughly. This methodological focus of empirical research of Polish catechetical experts is in conformity with the content of *Dyrektorium ogólne o katechizacji* [*General directory for catechesis*], in which the need to make use of the achievements of pedagogical sciences and contemporary catechetics is indicated<sup>24</sup>.

When making use of the research model described above, Polish catechetical experts occasionally make provisional hypotheses<sup>25</sup>. They usually determine general predictions concerning differences in the opinions of particular groups of respondents (e.g. catechised secondary school students and their parents, or various groups of religion teachers). They aptly refer to differences that are conditional upon dependent and independent variables. They usually adopt variables such as age, sex, school, length of service, education and experience<sup>26</sup>.

The technique that is employed most frequently in empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts is the diagnostic survey (questionnaire survey) technique<sup>27</sup>. Within the scope of this technique, catechetical experts use the printed version of the questionnaire survey that serves as a research tool. At the beginning of the questionnaire they include a short instruction containing an invitation to participate in research and assure participants that the obtained information will be anonymous and will be used only for scientific purposes. The content of the essential part of the questionnaire corresponds to model analyses presented in the theoretical part. It usually consists of open, half-open

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Congregation for Clergy, *Dyrektorium ogólne o katechizacji*, Poznań 1998, p. 148.

<sup>25</sup> For more information about this, refer to, e.g.: N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, *Metody badań jakościowych*, vol. 1-2, Warszawa 2009.

<sup>26</sup> S. Kulpaczyński, *Nurt badań empirycznych Kulowskiej katechetyki (1970-2010)*, p. 279 et al.

<sup>27</sup> For more details on this topic, see, e.g., T. Pilch, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych*, pp. 49-52.

and conjunctive questions<sup>28</sup>. The first category of questions requires respondents to formulate their own answers on a specific topic. In answers to questions built of semi-open and conjunctive cafeteria questions, participants in research have a set of answer options that contain one item usually marked with the word 'other'. This last category allows respondents to present their own answer if it does not fit any of the formulated options<sup>29</sup>. This is a proof of the qualitative approach to the subject area under analysis. Conjunctive cafeteria questions allow respondents to choose a few answer options. In the further part of the analysis they determine the frequency of choice of each answer and the establishment of their hierarchy. This form of research tool allows Polish catechetical experts to collect respondents' opinions on a given topic. The end of the questionnaire usually contains a part with basic information about the respondent. These are the questions determining, among other things, sex, age, the kind of school and form, the year and cycle of studies, length of service, and education. Apart from survey questionnaires, Polish catechetical experts occasionally use also other research tools (e.g. a free essay, an interview, participatory observation)<sup>30</sup>.

All empirical data acquired as a result of quantitative & qualitative research will be used for the preparation of statistical data. This, in turn, contributes to the improvement of knowledge and understanding of the subject area under analysis, a reliable description and proper conclusions.

### Research environments

The research environment – the place and the group of respondents – plays an important role in empirical research. Its selection depends mainly on the aim of the research and specific research problems. Polish catechetical experts are aware of this and, therefore, they conduct their research in diversified environments: in different areas of Poland and on various kinds of research samples.

Polish catechetical experts conduct research most frequently among young people and religion teachers (lay persons, priests, nuns). Occasionally, the research sample may consist of parents, younger schoolchildren, students, and persons engaged in religious communities in the parish.

Polish catechetical experts usually conduct research in urban schools and within the territory of specific dioceses. The statistical criterion appears to play an important role in the selection process. Essentially, small towns (up to 20,000 inhabitants), medium size towns (20,000-100,000 inhabitants) and cities (above 100,000 inhabitants) are selected. In this way, the criterion of the division of the site according to size (the number of inhabitants) is taken into ac-

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<sup>28</sup> For more details about this, see, e.g.: R. Buchta, *Organizacja pedagogicznych badań empirycznych dla potrzeb katechezy*, „Studia Pastoralne” 2 (2006) no. 2, pp. 298-314.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

count. Polish catechetical experts occasionally conduct research in rural areas if this is justified by the determined aims and research problems. The selection of the research environment depends largely on the subject area being undertaken.

### Substantive area of empirical research

In empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts, a number of thematic streams can be distinguished. The aim of the respondents is to show a specific subject area from the perspective of various groups of respondents (e.g., secondary school students, students of theology, religion teachers, parents of students being catechised<sup>31</sup>).

The first substantive area of research refers to the catechetical renewal process undertaken in Polish dioceses after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. For this purpose Polish catechetical experts conducted research among lay persons, priests and nuns working as religion teachers in various archdioceses and dioceses (e.g., Wrocław, Kraków, Katowice or Przemyśl dioceses). They also paid attention to the opinions of young people about catechesis in the parish and religion lessons at school. The results of this research were used for the elaboration of master's theses and doctoral dissertations. They were also occasionally published in papers and monographs<sup>32</sup>.

Another thematic area refers to psychological issues. It encompasses research on the penitential attitudes of young people, conflicts experienced by young people and attempts to solve them in catechesis, the attitude of the religion teacher, the sense of life, the identity of the lay religion teacher in the parish, and the personality of the religion teacher<sup>33</sup>. They are supplemented by analyses undertaken on the basis of the opinions of catechised young people on the identity of the priest, the image of the contemporary woman, and the retrospective, current and postulative images of the religion teacher<sup>34</sup>.

The aforementioned subject area involves empirical research concentrated among pedagogical issues. It includes, among other things, the opinions of respondents on education for peace, marriage and family, friendship, fellowship, love, role models, roles of new technologies in education, alcoholism and drug addition, human corporality, and sex education at school<sup>35</sup>. It is supplemented with research concerning the co-operation of religion teachers with

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<sup>31</sup> This topic is raised, among others, by S. Kulpaczyński, *Nurt badań empirycznych Kulowskiej katechetyki (1970-2010)*, pp. 279-306; cf. D. Kurzydło, *Badania empiryczne w katechetyce na przykładzie zastosowania ankiety audytoryjnej*, „Studia Katechetyczne” 9 (2013), pp. 181-213.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; cf. A. Zellma, *Wybrane kwestie katechetyczne na podstawie osobistych doświadczeń naukowych w zakresie badań empirycznych*, in: *Między sensem a bezsensem ludzkiej egzystencji. Teologiczna odpowiedź na fundamentalne pytania współczesnego człowieka*, ed. D. Bryl, B. Kochaniewicz, J. Nawrot, E. Kotowska, Poznań 2012, pp. 627-641.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

parents in terms of upbringing, and religious education at school and in the parish, particularly preparation for the sacraments of confirmation and marriage, and the role of youth magazines in the experiences of catechised students of upper secondary schools<sup>36</sup>. This also involves research concentrated around the didactic aspect of catechesis. It is characterised by an interest in the methods and forms of religious instruction, teaching aids (including the student's copybook, drawing in catechesis, homework, songs), the use of marks in catechesis, regional education, as well as readership and media education in religious instruction<sup>37</sup>. On the basis of the opinions of religion teachers and students, Polish catechetical experts verify theory against practice. On that basis, they make conclusions and proposals concerning the elaboration of new curricula and handbooks for the teaching of religion and the organisation of religion lessons and parish catechesis.

Apart from the aforementioned issues, Polish catechetical experts conduct empirical research on the formation of religion teachers<sup>38</sup>. They pay much attention to opinions expressed by nuns and lay persons working as religion teachers. They occasionally analyse the opinions of diocesan and monastic priests and students of theology. These issues are supplemented with the collection of religion teachers' opinions on religion lessons and parish catechesis<sup>39</sup>. On that basis they draw conclusions concerning the formation of religion teachers.

Polish catechetical experts also attempt to identify the state of knowledge and religious attitudes of catechised students. In connection with the above they conduct research concerning the person of Jesus Christ, the Sunday Mass, the sacrament of penance, reconciliation, prayer, the formation of the conscience, evangelical parables, religious symbols, the power of clergymen in the Church, anticlericalism, angelology and demonology<sup>40</sup>.

The described area of empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts encompasses various issues relating to integral catechesis. These are usually the opinions of respondents (young people, students of theology, religion teachers, parents) declared in connection with the subject area explored by Polish catechetical experts. On that basis, researchers try to measure the extent of the given phenomenon, describe reality in terms of quantities (figures and percentages), clarify respondents' opinions and elaborate new catechetical theories.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; cf., e.g., R. Buchta, *Znajomość przypowieści ewangelicznych u katechizowanych maturzystów liceów ogólnokształcących w Rudzie Śląskiej*, Katowice 2004; E. Gołąbek, *Modlitwa młodzieży*, Wrocław 2006; S. Kulpaczyński, *Relacje człowieka do aniołów i szatanów w opinii katechizowanych*, „Seminare” 21 (2005), pp. 297-312.

## Conclusions

The scope of empirical research conducted by Polish catechetical experts encompasses a wide range of issues relating to integral catechesis. On this basis, pastoral & catechetical conclusions and proposals are formulated. This, in turn, contributes to the verification of catechetical theory and the elaboration of new concepts.

In view of the preliminary diagnostic value of quantitative & qualitative research conducted by Polish catechetical experts, it seems justified to conduct further research in various types of schools in the entire territory of Poland. This will help to become familiar with students' opinions, and may be used for the real planning of religious instruction at school. By making use of empirical data, both theoreticians and practical experts will extend the scope of their knowledge of students and the challenges faced by Polish catechesis.

It is also worth paying more attention to qualitative research, which requires the use of "soft" tools. They help to express catechetical problems in various aspects, to understand them better, to look for answers to detailed questions, and to identify the reality of catechesis, which is variable in terms of content and meaning, on the basis of the personal knowledge and experiences of respondents.

Professional efforts connected with empirical research in Polish catechesis require further appreciation of the value of empirical team research with the use of jointly elaborated research tools. Such research would have to be organised at the same time in various dioceses, provinces and academic centres in Poland. This requires dialogue and co-operation among catechetical experts from various theological centres in Poland. Such a defined scope of research activity will contribute to the solid development of theory and the improvement of catechetical practice.

## Summary

Contemporary Polish catechetical idea takes into account various issues of teaching and Christian education in the family, at school or in the parish. A lot of attention is paid to concepts and models of teaching religion in schools. Polish catechetists from various academic centers (eg. Lublin, Poznań, Olsztyn) make attempts to verify the existing catechetical theories through empirical research. Significant here is the contribution of Fr. prof. Stanisław Kulpaczyński from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

The article focuses on methodological and substantive aspects of empirical research in the Polish catechetical field. First there have been described methods, techniques and research tools. It has been shown that Polish catechetical experts usually employ quantitative and qualitative methods using a questionnaire. They select different groups of respondents. Most often they conduct empirical research in schools – among young people and among catechists from different

dioceses. From the merits they are interested in their issues such as catechesis in schools, the formation of catechists, religion teaching methods, giving marks on catechesis, conflict solution, cooperation with parents, parish catechesis. The results of empirical research are presented in articles and monographs as well as in doctoral dissertations. On this basis the Polish catechetists work out new catechetical solutions.

**Key words:** Polish catechetic, empirical research, catechesis, teaching religion in schools, catechetical solutions.