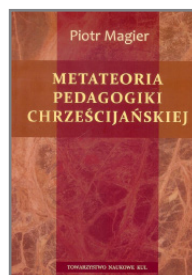


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## The Scientific Character of Christian Pedagogy

Piotr Magier, *Metateoria pedagogiki chrześcijańskiej*  
[*The Meta-theory of Christian Pedagogy*], Catholic University of Lublin Scientific Press, Lublin 2019, 230 pages

Although speaking and writing about religion in academic pedagogy is no longer considered an evident departure from science, it still evokes a tangible sense of embarrassment and awkwardness. It is regarded appropriate (politically correct?) to remain neutral in religious matters. From this point of view, Christian pedagogy can—at most—be seen as a niche, ancillary theory of education (Kwieciński 2007). While it has the right to exist, it is only on one condition: that it does not abuse the privilege granted to it by making its presence felt too often or by attempting to enter a wider circulation of pedagogical thought. In my opinion, Piotr Magier's book carries the defiant message of breaking this stereotype. As the title itself suggests, the author intends to present the meta-theory of Christian pedagogy. This issue cannot be reduced to an impartial summary and categorization of the achievements of educators who adopt a religious point of view in upbringing and education, but it is also necessary to pose the more fundamental question: do these theories constitute Christian pedagogy as a science, and to what extent?



SPI Vol. 23, 2020/1  
ISSN 2450-5358  
e-ISSN 2450-5366

In this context, at first glance, it may seem surprising that the author should admit that after reading the book, “the readers ... may ... feel disappointed” (p. 181) by two omissions in his publication. Namely, they will find neither practical instructions on how to educate in Christian faith, nor “an outline of the theoretical foundations of Christian pedagogy” (p. 181). However, are these really the expectations of this publication? Piotr Magier modestly asks, “what effects did the study of Christian pedagogy bring in terms of meta-theory?” (p. 182). This question is not, in my opinion, only a rhetorical device, after which one can proceed to a summary of conclusions, but a central problem that the author addresses and—I think—successfully solves at this stage of the development of Christian pedagogy. The very fact that he formulates this question is not without significance. In my opinion, it marks a turning point in the development of the (self-)perception of Christian pedagogy. Its groundbreaking importance lies in shifting the accent from apologetic justification of its unique aspects in favor of an open discussion of its scientific validity. I would like to focus on the latter here.

The very structure of the book invites reflection on Christian pedagogy in relation to the question of its scientific status. It is worth noting that the author uses the term “science” in a broad (non-scientific) sense. He does not treat Christian pedagogy as a self-evident axiomatic discipline, but he explores it as a problem—in other words, as one of the possibilities of reflection on Christian upbringing (and education?). This is because adopting the scientific perspective entails restrictions and has consequences for both sides: Christian pedagogy and academic (scientific) pedagogy. We do not often encounter such an approach in Poland today. In the recently ended period of the domination of socialist education theory, the elimination of religious connotations was believed to be an indisputable pedagogical imperative. The pedagogy textbooks disseminated at that time propagated a thought pattern according to which the emergence and development of pedagogy as a science should be owed to the gradual emancipation of practice and the theory of education from its servile dependence on the institution or the doctrines of the Catholic Church (Kurdybacha, 1961; Muszyński, 1976, pp. 10–12; Okoń, 1970, p. 19; Suchodolski, 1957, pp. 282–283; 1959, pp. 86–87; 1965, pp. 143–145; 1967, pp. 85–93; 1980, pp. 40–43). Achieving full autonomy for pedagogy

(be it scientific or philosophical) was attendant on explicit renunciation of any contact with religion. At the same time, however, the ideological nature of every scientific theory, including pedagogy, was emphasized. This ultimately schizophrenic attitude did not go into the past together with the era in which an open fight against religion and religiosity was at the forefront, but is still present in the thoughts of some academic educators (Stępkowski, 2018, pp. 108–109).

Returning to the structure of Piotr Magier's study and its intention to confront Christian pedagogy with the idea of scientific validity, it should be noted that it has a classic layout. It consists of three chapters, preceded by an introduction and ending with a conclusion. The author has attached a fairly extensive bibliography, an abstract in English, and an index of names. The chapters follow three stages of discussion on the scientific status of Christian pedagogy. The first and second stages are introductory. In the first chapter, the author familiarizes the reader with the history of meta-theoretical research, the term and concept of a "meta-theory," the functions of such research, and finally, its application in pedagogy. In the second chapter, the reader is taken on an "educational journey" through four wide-ranging disciplines that are not easy to synthesize. These disciplines are indicated in the titles of the subsections: "Science," "Christianity," "Christian pedagogy," and "Pedagogy of religion." The last term refers to a subdiscipline of education theory which should not be equated with Christian pedagogy and whose emergence (at the turn of the 19th century) was "a consequence of the confrontation of Christianity with the ideology of the Enlightenment and modernism" (p. 106). Discussion of this issue closes the propedeutic stages and leads to the third chapter entitled "The methodological identity of Christian pedagogy" (p. 111), in which Piotr Magier's analysis reaches its climax.

The author explores three problem areas with rigor and acuity worthy of a methodologist. The first consists of the definitions and types of Christian pedagogy. After conducting the analysis, Piotr Magier is inclined to conclude that

there are two basic methods of determining the *genus proximum* of Christian pedagogy. One of them is to categorize it as a pedagogical subdiscipline; the other is to define it as one of the pedagogical trends (systems, currents, outlooks, or schools) (p. 135)

According to this distinction, the second problem area covers the characteristics of Christian pedagogy “as a pedagogical science (subdiscipline)” (p. 136), while the third one “as a pedagogical trend (system)” (p. 167).

When portraying Christian pedagogy as a pedagogical science, the author employs the following determinants of scientific validity: the object (material and formal) of research, the goals, the language, and the method of justifying theorems and composing the structure. He does not scrutinize these issues with the presupposed intention of demonstrating the scientific status of Christian pedagogy, but from a perspective that can be described as science studies. This allows him to enter into a critical dialogue with various—sometimes extremely opposite—voices on how to interpret the determinants listed above. Thanks to this, he also shows how complex and ambiguous the approach to science can be. In doing so, Piotr Magier does not gloss over the inconsistencies and even contradictions in Christian pedagogy. An example of this is language. The author writes that “the language of Christian pedagogy remains ... the composition of at least two different languages: scientific language (of the humanities or philosophy) and religious language” (p. 156). It is, therefore, not surprising that sometimes these two languages clash. However, this problem ails not only Christian educators, but it applies to all educators in general. Combining different types of language distinguishes education theory as a science. This does not mean, however, that in Christian pedagogy we do not have to be vigilant about the intersubjective communication of the language that we use. On the contrary, it is one of the major challenges for its methodology.

Piotr Magier opens his considerations on the possibility of viewing Christian pedagogy as a pedagogical trend (system) with the suggestion that the use of terms such as “current,” “movement,” “system,” or “school” is still plagued by ambiguity. However, in fact, these names express the same idea, namely, that similar outlooks can be grouped and put together into a homogeneous whole. Undoubtedly, Christian pedagogy can be considered such a whole, with a number of unifying elements. “The classic representatives of this system point to its key principles: theocentrism, christocentrism, ecclesiocentrism, moralism, and personalism, as well as dogmas about the Incarnation, Redemption, the Church and the sacraments” (p. 172). In addition,

in the author's opinion, an important element that unifies Christian pedagogy is the philosophical concepts employed by the authors who identify themselves with this system. "Traditionally, it is assumed that the philosophical foundations of Christian pedagogy include two movements of philosophy: the Aristotelian/Thomistic system ... and various currents of existential philosophy" (p. 173).

Without going into a detailed discussion of each of these markers of Christian pedagogy as a homogeneous pedagogical trend, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Piotr Magier prefers to use the category "pedagogical system" in this context. He writes that

this term is important inasmuch as it indicates that the scope of Christian pedagogy is so broad, multi-faceted, and elementary that it forms the basis of other pedagogical approaches (currents, schools, or directions). It is both about the religious content that anchors them and the philosophical concepts that underlie them. (p. 172)

Based on this excerpt, it can be concluded that the systemic design of Christian pedagogy is based, according to the author, on the duality of the knowledge that constitutes it. This knowledge comes from both the area denoted by the name "religion" and from the area dubbed "philosophy," or more broadly—social sciences and humanities. Having explored the constitution of Christian pedagogy, we must inevitably return to the key question about its scientific status.

If the assignment of the epithet "scientific" depended solely on the avoidance of relationships with religion, as was the case during the domination of the socialist theory of education, then owing to the coexistence of two types of cognition, Christian pedagogy would stand no chance of rising to the level of science and, consequently, qualifying for an elite group of academic pedagogies. This state of affairs, however, changes radically when science rejects demarcation criteria that have been used in the past and still attempt to arbitrarily steer the understanding of scientific rationality. Opening themselves up to scientific practice, Christian educators are required to recognize the methodological problems that beset their discipline of knowledge and to seek solutions that account for its scientific aspirations. The main advantage of Piotr Magier's publication is laying the groundwork of this approach to the problem of scientific validity in Christian pedagogy. Of course, there is also the contingency that Christian educators will not want to strive for the scientific nature

of Christian pedagogy. Such a solution would, however, be a blow not only to the educational aspects, but also to the Christian character of these theories. Paradoxically, Christianity has been inseparably linked to rationality from the very beginning. Not only was it subject to rationality in defining its religious truths, but it also co-created it. Such commitment to the development of academic (scientific) pedagogy should be expected nowadays from a Christian pedagogy that is open to science.

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