

Mariusz Konieczny

ORCID: 0000-0001-6967-5231

St. Adalbert Parish in Tyśmienica

For the Sake of Human Dignity

Janusz Mariański, *Godność ludzka w narracji społecznej. Studium socjopedagogiczne* [*Human Dignity in Social Narrative: A Socio-pedagogical Study*], Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2021, pp. 302

In the introduction to the publication by Janusz Mariański we can find the summary of what human dignity actually is and how we should understand it in the contemporary world: human dignity includes the most important human values and no one formally questions the principle of respecting it as the foundation of the civil society. Changes taking place in the modern world are connected with globalization, mobility of societies and human thoughts, higher level of education, and increasingly easier access to the mass media. Some sociologists perceive these changes as the basis for claiming that human dignity is becoming weaker or that it even faces a crisis. Challenges related to the contemporary migration policy, the failure to accept the basic ethical principles, as well as clear rejection of religiousness and its moral laws, become the impulse to searching for the answer to the question of understanding and meaning of a person. Artificially radical choices, which are characterized by varied emotional intensity and refer to details of human life, including moral values, encourage us to carry out profound analyses concerning not only human liberty and freedom to present particular opinions and approaches to life, but also the way in which we perceive human dignity and human nature as such.



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Recenzje

Reviews

The importance of dignity has recently increased, but it is not equal to the role ascribed to values, attitudes and behaviors related to dignity. Without deep analysis of the essence of human dignity and its consequences, we will not be able to capture the truth of who a man really is and what his social relationships are like. In the book in question, Janusz Mariański is trying to refer to contemporary demands related to the discussions around the issue of perceiving freedom. It is an attempt to provide an adequate and complementary answer to the above-mentioned questions, as the author takes into account the changing perspective of the religious, social, political, and economical situation. The book is the result of a long cognitive process presented in the texts: *Godność ludzka jako wartość społeczno-moralna: mit czy rzeczywistość? Studium interdyscyplinarne* [*Human Dignity as a Social and Moral Value: Myth or Reality? Interdisciplinary Study*] (Toruń 2016), *Godność ludzka w kontekście społecznym. Szkice ze społecznego nauczania Kościoła katolickiego* [*Human Dignity in the Social Context: Essays on the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church*] (Lublin 2017), *Godność ludzka – wartość ocalona? Studium socjopedagogiczne* [*Human Dignity – A Value that Was Saved? Socio-pedagogical Study*] (Płock 2017), *Godność ludzka – wartość doceniona czy puste słowo? Studium socjopedagogiczne* [*Human Dignity – An Appreciated Value or an Empty Word? Socio-pedagogical Study*] (Warszawa 2019). The book which is being reviewed is a kind of a summary of the author's intellectual quests, as well as his attempt to define human dignity and its understanding by the contemporary Polish youth. Also, it is a diagnosis showing modern threats and providing specific hints for the institutions that shape our social life.

In the postmodern world, experiential, pleasure-oriented and postmaterialist values become increasingly more important. People do not feel the need for stability; they are focused on short pleasures, and become more and more oriented at collecting events and interactions. Such attitudes also facilitate shaping norms and values that are often adopted through departing from the established, traditional axiological-normative canon. Sociological research, which was also carried out in the Polish society that undergoes sudden transformation, presents a pessimistic image of a human being indulged in hedonism and pragmatism, oriented at consumerism, and prone to violence and egoistic attitudes. Changes in moral attitudes and

behaviors oscillate between absolutism and moral rigorism, and tendencies characterized by utilitarianism, permissiveness and moral relativism the supporters of which emphasize an individual's right to autonomy, independence and happiness.

Primate Stefan Wyszyński noticed these phenomena in the Polish society and tried to refer to them in his teachings. His suggestions, especially in the context of his beatification, should become the determinants of the pastoral activity of the Polish Church. Janusz Mariański mentioned this issue in his book, presenting the basic assumptions and the original nature of the teachings of the Primate of the Millennium. Stefan Wyszyński's social thought was based on a person who, in their ontic dimension, is a substantial unity of body and soul. The originality of Wyszyński's Catholic social teaching consists in the fact that it was inspired by all the books of the Bible; both the Old and the New Testament. Moreover, he gave the teaching of the Church a historical context, emphasizing its continuity and developmental nature of the basic social and moral principles. Wyszyński placed a human being in the center of his teachings, presenting a person as God's creature with a special dignity and vocation, as well as exceptional rights, such as the right to nature, to freedom, and to equal treatment by other people and institutions. While presenting a human being in the context of creation and relation to God, he showed the religious concept of a man's dignity. On the supernatural level, the basic ingredient of a person's value is the truth concerning being created in the image of God and being God's child through redemption.

The personalistic and integral approach to the Catholic social teaching is expressed in emphasizing the natural and supernatural dignity of a human being, human rights and ethical-social principles. Each representative of the *homo sapiens* species is endowed with dignity. It is an inalienable feature that cannot be lost. All structures and institutions of social life should serve a human being. A person cannot feel a slave in their own national or religious community. The primacy of a human being over the material world or even social life is based on the spiritual properties of human nature. As a person, a human being is more important than any community, e.g. a national, state, professional, economic, or cultural one. Thus, human dignity is absolute; it only changes in the historical development to the

extent to which a person changes. Dignity is given to a human being as a feature and as a task, which is determined by the dynamic nature of a person. On these theoretical principles Stefan Wyszyński builds the concept of social order with reference to marriage and family, nation, the state, and the whole human family.

Human dignity is also the crucial idea of the social and moral teaching in the message proclaimed by John Paul II. This issue is discussed in almost all of his encyclicals. According to John Paul II, dignity is the fundamental feature of a human being and the society. It plays the role of a criterion of morality, and, in a way, it is the determinant of the value of human action. The Pope made a radical turn in the social teaching of the Church, i.e. he emphasized that the starting point for the social analysis of the reality is a person endowed with dignity, and not the social and economic aspect. The result of such an approach to a human being is the thesis according to which human dignity is the basis for formulating human rights. Also, John Paul II discussed the social dimension of dignity in which the respect of human dignity, of each person and of the whole person, should be considered not only in the categories of respecting an individual, but also in a broader context of united and harmonious development of all members of the society.

While emphasizing the importance of respecting human dignity, the Pope, in his social and moral teaching, often indicated various threats to dignity in the material and spiritual dimension. Along with huge progress in mastering the world of things, a person has become a slave to the world of matter. Also, certain social relationships make a man enslaved. Instead of the expected harmony, tension and fear is created between a man and products of technology. Spiritual threats to human dignity include, according to John Paul II, violation of the basic human rights, such as the right to religion, to freedom of conscience, to raising children according to their parents' faith and beliefs, and the right to education adjusted to an individual's abilities. Summarizing the Pope's social and moral teaching, Janusz Mariański concludes that it includes two integral elements: the vision of supernatural dignity, which is based on the Christian revelation, and the vision of natural dignity resulting from the observation of human nature.

Mariański started his profound theoretical analysis of human dignity from the attempt to define it. He enumerated its three main areas which became, in a way, orbits around which he moves in further parts of his book. Therefore, in his work we can see that he distinguishes the dignity of a person from the dignity of personality and personal dignity. However, these are not three separate spheres which are totally unconnected with one another. Moving within the area of Christian personalism, Mariański clearly marked the common denominator of the new notions: a person. While taking up his considerations, he indicated that human dignity is a fundamental value, the normative basis of human rights, and the most general value and norm of social order. Each person has their dignity due to the fact that he/she is a subject and a human being. Therefore, a person is born as a rational being who is free and endowed with conscience. A man cannot deprive himself of these properties and no one can take them away from him, which is why this value is inalienable and permanent. A person, in their dignity, is greater than the whole reality around them.

Apart from such principles related to dignity, the sociologist from Lublin distinguishes values such as personality dignity and personal dignity, as well as professional dignity. Personality dignity is expressed in the concentration of human actions and abilities, and it is manifested in various kinds of perfection, especially those that were preserved in a man's morally valuable actions and in his character. Personal dignity refers to feelings and subjective awareness, and it is connected with the dignity of a person. Also, dignity is connected with a specific social role or with the profession of a given person. Social roles or a specific profession make a person obliged to comply with certain norms of behavior which is perceived as decent. Indecent behavior results in the loss of dignity related to a specific social role. Dignity, first of all, refers to people and, in the second place, to their social roles.

A very interesting issue taken up by Mariański is presenting how young people perceive dignity and where they see its roots. Referring to his own studies, he answers the question whether the surveyed young people are aware of the supernatural source of their dignity, or whether they understand it as the result of purely human agreements and treaties. The author provides such answers based on the

utterances of the youth concerning various issues related to understanding dignity: as a value referring to oneself and other people; as a style of moral life; as noninfringement of the dignity of oneself and others and sacrificing oneself for others; as respect, pride and honor; as the basis for human rights; as the equivalent of other values; as the sense of one's value; as the essence of humanity; and as human dignity in the religious dimension.

The utterances of the surveyed people indicate that most of them have a positive approach to dignity, thinking about it in a superficial way and associating various contents with the notion. The youth are aware of the fact that dignity is a very important thing that cannot be taken away from a human being; that it is given to us so that we can respect one another; and that it is the highest human value that cannot be lost. Also, according to the research, in the conscience of the young people, the notion of dignity is generally connected with positive emotional associations, but it refers to individual and social functions and values rather than to its essence. The majority of the surveyed people claim that dignity is a noticeable and experienceable value, but they do not reflect on it much. Moreover, most young people fail to see the connection between dignity and religion. On the basis of the research, Mariański formulates the thesis according to which the youth appreciate people with high sense of one's own dignity. Such people are generally seen as those who respect the rules and principles specifying what is good or bad.

In the modern world there are many phenomena in which human dignity is infringed or even consciously questioned. The crucial role in this process is played by economic, social and political conditions. Janusz Mariański indicates that the social teaching of the Catholic Church includes the description of the phenomena from various areas of economic, professional, political and social life, as well as phenomena related to interpersonal relationships, in which human dignity is infringed. From the ethical point of view, the social teaching of the Church evaluates any signs of human degradation and various systems of injustice functioning in social life. At the same time, it perceives a man, seen as a person in their natural and supernatural dignity, as the highest value of the moral and social order.

Situations that threaten human dignity are facilitated by, inter alia, subjectivist realism, which is getting more and more popular

nowadays. The truth itself is also falsified, as a result of which a man lives in the so-called fluid society that has no permanent references. The author of the book in question emphasizes that human dignity is a value that is desired and undesired at the same time. On the one hand, we still refer to dignity; we condemn situations in which basic human rights are violated. On the other hand, there are those who perceive dignity as an unnecessary value and aim at removing it since it causes unnecessary conflicts.

Taking into account the above, Mariański believes that we can formulate certain educational recommendations for the future. Social order cannot be maintained without moral values, and morality cannot be replaced with certain economic mechanisms. The accelerated process of changing values involves new chances as well as threats. Those who exert the strongest influence on shaping attitudes that support dignity include the elites of the society, i.e. those who create public opinion. It is important for us to bring up young people for universal moral values. The author notices that, as people, we are not just subjects of modern transformation, but also its creators. Pluralism or relativism of moral values is a fact, and not a norm or an ideal. We need permanent axiological and normative directions, i.e. universal values that resist the process of relativization.

In education oriented at dignity, a human being becomes open to truth and beauty, and tries to be faithful to the adopted values. Moral education, considered from the sociological point of view, leads to such a point in human development in which an individual determines the moral value of his/her actions, i.e. what is right or wrong, honest or dishonest, referring to the principles, aims and ideals perceived as valid in a given culture. Moral education cannot only include teaching students a system of regulations and norms, and encouraging them to comply with that moral code. Such education should, first of all, shape proper moral attitudes of the young generation. The dignity of a person is the foundation of education, which is why moral education gains the qualities of personalist education.

Education for dignity refers not only to the period of childhood and youth, but also to the whole life of a human being. It requires both the influence of organized institutions and the person's own efforts. Janusz Mariański notices that the basic educational idea depends on the adopted concept of a man. In his opinion, moral

education, understood as education for humanity, is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first one includes the belief that a man is called to live in true love, and the other one proclaims that each person achieves fulfillment through a selfless gift of self. In modern education and upbringing, one has to, first of all, take into account the necessity of arousing the student's sense of personal dignity and necessity to respect it. The student must be supported in understanding that he himself and every other person are the highest value. Referring to the utterances of the surveyed young people, Mariański emphasizes that, in terms of education, they focus on the individual transfer of values related to dignity rather than on the message sent by various institutions and social groups. Also, he notices that the youth hardly ever believe that developing faith can be the way to respect and admire dignity.

The Lublin sociologist underlines that a family is the first school of humanity. Family education for the sense of a person's dignity is a process which facilitates building true personality of a child and an adolescent. Also, within a family the processes of socialization occur. As a communion of love, a family is where we start to learn that a person, becoming a gift of self to another person, gives the only proper direction to one's development, and that only in this way a man can truly grow. It is from their parents that children take over various moral attitudes, which are sometimes contradictory to the values promoted in their environments. However, a family is not isolated from other educational institutions. The best conditions that warrant the success of moral education of the young generation will be provided when family and other educational institutions bring up children in a coordinated and non-contradictory manner.

However, the crucial issue to be taken into account in modern education and upbringing is the necessity to arouse the student's sense of personal dignity and concern for respecting it. It consists in supporting the student in understanding that he himself and every other man is the highest value. Also, it is important to remind them that dignity has a normative dimension. That is why, we should support the student in caring for their own moral development, in establishing goals in life, and in discovering the ways to achieve those goals. Falsifying human freedom, and treating it in an absolute manner and without any limitations, threatens human dignity or even

leads to different forms of personal and social enslavement. As a consequence, permissiveness and moral relativism develops, especially the one that infringes the basic values. Freedom is to be analyzed in the axiological horizon determined by the dignity of a human being. Freedom that is fulfilled properly always refers to other values and takes into account responsibility for another person.

A profound analysis of varied views on the basic value of a man, i.e. human dignity, based on different concepts of a person, makes it possible for us to get to know the actual status, i.e. what a person is and what threats are facing them. The author of the book in question formulates a very important postulate, i.e. in discussing issues related to human dignity we cannot only maintain the positive law approach, but we have to carry out ontological and deontological analysis of human rights, and create a specific foundation for the protection of human rights. Reliable empirical research helps us answer the basic questions that were also formulated during the Polish change of the political system: what actually is human dignity; what are its modern threats; and what educational directions and means can secure the most fundamental human rights? Janusz Mariański accurately presented various social contexts in which values related to dignity function, the way in which dignity is understood by the Polish youth, the ways of justifying dignity, and the mechanisms of giving or taking dignity away from others in the social and moral sense. Also, he emphasized that the models of life promoted by modern culture facilitate relativization or infringement of the dignity of people who belong to various social layers and groups.

Also, the author of the book suggests that sociological sciences should discuss human dignity in a broader scope, so that it becomes a specific trend in psychology, sociology and pedagogy, which would also contribute to overcoming the moral crisis noticeable in the modern world. This postulate also refers to people who determine the directions of the Catholic Church's pastoral activity. Such people should make sure that their actions focus on proclaiming the truth about the dignity of each person, as well as criticism of the situations that threaten such dignity. Janusz Mariański emphasizes that education for values related to dignity should reflect the fact that dignity also has a normative dimension. That is why, a man should be supported in shaping attitudes that make him obliged to moral

development, establishing objectives in life, discovering the ways to fulfill them, as well as valuating and achieving specific results. The fulfillment of the above-mentioned assumptions directly or indirectly leads to the achievement or at least closeness to the fullness of humanity. Education oriented at values, which is called personalist education, leads to forming a man understood in an integral manner, to developing what is human in him, and to reinforcing the connection with truth and good in him. The acknowledgement of a person's dignity and their being separate from the surrounding world determines the direction of moral education of a man so that he can be not only with others but also for others. This is not only fulfilled through the work of teachers and educators, as well as educational institutions, but also through the activity of the students who enjoy dignity and want to use their natural potential to the maximum.

The analysis of the issues that are valid in the modern world and placing them within the area of the young Polish generation result in the fact that the book by Janusz Mariański is a precious source of knowledge both to the specialists dealing with the issue and to other people who search for the answer to the question of morality and moral education in the context of the globalizing world. The book is an exceptionally valuable source of knowledge for theoreticians who analyze sociological systems and those who wish to follow the most fundamental rules taking into account the personal dignity of a human being. Moreover, this publication can be an important source of knowledge for the people who research the present condition of the Catholic Church and those who determine the directions of its pastoral functioning aimed at building the society on the basis of permanent values among which a man, with his natural and supernatural dignity, plays the crucial role.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Mariusz Konieczny
St. Adalbert Parish in Tyśmienica
e-mail: mariusz-ko@wp.pl