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# Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko as a Role Model in Upbringing Towards Christian Maturity

## ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the personal model role in upbringing towards higher values. The objective of the text is to answer the following question: How can the example of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko be used in raising the youth to be mature Christians?

To analyze the problem, the author uses Marian Nowak's concept of Christian maturity. The method she uses is historical/pedagogical biographic analysis. Selected studies and source texts prove that even at an early stage of his life, Popiełuszko fulfilled the Christian maturity criteria specified by Nowak: he envisioned a truly human life and permanently practiced features that facilitated its realization, such as scrupulousness, authenticity, and courage. He fulfilled these criteria as a Christian for whom the ultimate meaning of existence is salvation. It is worth remembering this role model and raising young people according to Nowak's criteria. It may be helpful to show some dramatic events from Popiełuszko's life, which may serve as inspiration on how to develop Christian maturity.

## KEYWORDS

Christian maturity,  
personal model,  
Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko,  
scrupulousness,  
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## Introduction

A key aspect of values education is the timelessness of its goals—the idea that certain goals are permanent and universal. Marian Nowak emphasizes that one such enduring goal is to instill in students a sense of *humanitas* (Nowak 1999). In other words, it is to help them to fully realize their humanity. This goal is achieved through the cultivation of increasingly personal and meaningful relationships.

Role models play an important role in the process of realizing one's humanity. In pedagogy, a role model is defined as a description of a specific person, their behavior, personality, and achievements. Wincenty Okoń notes that a role model is seen as someone exceptional, and capable of defending their ideals even in the most difficult moments of life (Okoń 2007). A role model is someone who is worthy of imitation and influences both the emotional and volitional development of the one who looks up to them (Maj 2006; Bakiera, Harwas-Napierała 2016; Juroszek 2022, 2023a, 2023b).

In Christianity, saints serve as role models for the faithful. Recognized for their heroic virtues, they exemplify closeness to God and service to others. Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko is one such figure. His life and work have been extensively documented, particularly in historical (Litka 2009; Kindziuk 2014; Gromadzki, Witkowski 2022) and theological studies (Sochoń 2010; Skoczylas 2012).

This article aims to illustrate how young people can be guided toward Christian maturity by looking to Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko as a role model. Given the breadth of this topic, the focus is on Popiełuszko's early years—his childhood, adolescence, and the beginnings of his adult life—when his authentic Christian maturity first became evident. Special attention is given to his time in a maximum-security military unit in Bartoszyce. It was there, at the age of just under 20, that Popiełuszko first confronted representatives of the communist Security Service, who would later brutally murder him. For young adults, Fr. Jerzy's example shows that even at a young age, it is possible to stand up to overwhelming, destructive forces like communism and those who enforce it. In a world where totalitarian powers such as Russia and China are on the rise, the question of how to nurture one's humanity under extreme conditions is more relevant than ever.



This issue is examined through the lens of Marian Nowak's concept of Christian maturity (1999).

### Criteria of Christian maturity according to Marian Nowak

Marian Nowak argues that true maturity involves two essential qualities that are true signs of the fulfilment of one's humanity. The first is the ability to recognize one's true aspirations and to create a plan (project) for one's life which is grounded in authentic human values. The second is the development of positive traits that enable the realization of this plan (Nowak 1999: 409). As Nowak puts it, "a mature person is an integrated person; someone who has developed a project for living an 'authentically human' life and possesses the necessary qualities to achieve it" (Nowak 1999: 414).

Referring to the works of Gordon Allport, Zdzisław Chlewiński, and Kazimierz Dąbrowski, Nowak observes that people are driven by certain aspirations that guide them in forming a life plan. These aspirations include affirming one's self-worth, the desire for action and cooperation, the pursuit of greatness, honor, glory, and significance, the need for acceptance, respect, and love, the quest for truth and objective values, the desire to contribute to culture and civilization, taking responsible actions, and organizing personal development toward inner integration (Nowak 1999: 410–411). These aspirations are crucial in creating a life plan, a process that becomes particularly significant in early adulthood. At this stage, self-awareness should be relatively well-developed, which, in turn, facilitates self-knowledge and leads to a deeper understanding of one's needs, abilities, values, and ideals (Mądrzycki 1996: 66). As young adults grow older, they should refine this self-knowledge, which facilitates the creation of realistic life plans (projects). Unlike ordinary plans, a life plan involves shaping one's entire existence. This process requires considerable autonomy, independence, freedom, and self-reliance.

Nowak identifies several key personality traits that support the fulfilment of one's life plan:

- Perseverance: The ability to respond consistently to life's difficulties and challenges, marked by conscientiousness, reliability, and the sustained effort to overcome discouragement, weakness, and passivity.



- Self-sacrificing love: This is expressed through warm, empathetic relationships with others and a genuine pursuit of truth and goodness free from pretense.
- “Reasonable creativity”: The capacity to seek out and discover solutions for fulfilling one’s life plan, characterized by courage, emotional stability, balance, and prudence (Nowak 1999: 412).

The combination of a life project (life plan) and positive personality traits leads to a deep, comprehensive integration within a person, which can rightly be seen as maturity. Nowak emphasizes that maturity should be understood as dynamic and active, rather than something fixed or static. It is not a state that, once reached, remains unchanged; instead, it requires a constant effort to fully realize its potential.

Maturity takes on a Christian dimension when human aspirations and life plans are placed within the context of the Christian faith, including the ultimate goal of every Christian, which is salvation and eternal life (Marek 2016: 67). This involves embracing Jesus Christ as the personal role model and recognizing that following and imitating Him is made possible through supernatural grace (Gogacz 1999). Nowak points out the need to distinguish between human maturity and Christian maturity. He argues that while these two aspects are sometimes discussed separately, they should not be viewed as entirely distinct.

In the context of the “mystery of the Incarnation and Resurrection,” a Christian has only one maturity: the “human” maturity elevated by supernatural grace to a higher, supernatural level. This transformation means that “human maturity” becomes Christian, oriented towards the ultimate goal, and elevated to the “supernatural” dimension (to the level of mystery). As Christian maturity, it requires a way of life that reflects this higher state, fitting for a mature person. (Nowak 1999: 415)

## Method

This study focuses on the function of role models in values education, specifically addressing the question: How can young people be guided towards Christian maturity following the example of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko?



The article uses the historical and pedagogical biography method (Szulakiewicz 2007, 2015a, 2015b), analyzing the life and activities of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko (1947–1984). The analysis is set against the backdrop of the Polish People's Republic, a period between 1945 and 1989 when Poland was under the political and economic hegemony of the USSR. Popiełuszko's peak activity took place during martial law and the rise of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity." The communist Security Service, a state organ under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which used various kinds of violence against those who opposed the communist government played a key role in surveilling Popiełuszko, and was responsible for his eventual torture and death.

The research draws on biographical studies and source materials, including letters, and approaches the subject from a pedagogical perspective. The framework used is based on Marian Nowak's (1999) indicators of Christian maturity, which include:

- Developing a life plan centered on the pursuit of salvation.
- Cultivating personality traits that support this plan, such as conscientiousness (reflecting consistency in facing life's challenges); authenticity (reflecting the ability for self-sacrificial love and the pursuit of truth); and courage (reflecting what Nowak terms "reasonable creativity").

Christian maturity, as characterized by these traits, was analyzed in key stages of Jerzy Popiełuszko's life: his childhood, adolescence, and particularly the onset of early adulthood, when a person's maturity should be largely developed.

## Biography of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko: Shaping a life plan

Jerzy Popiełuszko was born on September 14, 1947, in the village of Okopy, located in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (Sokołka County, Suchowola Commune), near the border of what was then the Soviet Union (Sikorska 1991: 1–3). He was the third of five children born to Władysław and Marianna Popiełuszko. Although the family was not wealthy, they did not experience poverty (Sikorska 1991: 4; Sochoń 2010: 15). Jerzy was an average student but had a particular interest in humanities, especially history and Polish language and literature.



From a young age, he was deeply religious, he served as an altar boy and attended Mass daily.

As he reached the end of his adolescence, Popiełuszko's life plan began to take shape, centering on spreading the Gospel and serving his homeland through a spirit of love for God and neighbor. This commitment was evident when he enrolled at the Metropolitan Higher Seminary for Priests in Warsaw in 1965 (Kindziuk 2014: 27). Between 1966 and 1968, while still a seminary student, he completed his compulsory military service in Bartoszyce, in a high-security unit designated for priest candidates. Due to the harsh conditions of military life Popiełuszko fell seriously ill and never fully recovered, yet it was during this time that his faith grew even stronger. Biographers of Fr. Jerzy note that his experience in the military marked a pivotal moment in his life, as he began to consciously prepare for his future role as the chaplain of the Warsaw "Solidarity" movement (Sochoń 2010; Kindziuk 2014; Brien 2016). It was here that his life plan—dedicating himself to serving his homeland through the Catholic faith—started to crystallize. During his military service, Popiełuszko gained a deep understanding of the communist system's methods for oppressing people. As one biographer noted, "Paradoxically, the difficult military service unleashed hidden energies in him, which were soon to be revealed when—already as a priest in Warsaw—he had to stand face to face with the employees of the Security Service" (Sochoń 2010: 27).

In May 1972, Popiełuszko was ordained as a priest by Primate Stefan Wyszyński. His life's mission, which was deeply altruistic and oriented towards the well-being of others, was captured in the message inscribed on the card commemorating his First Holy Mass: "God sends me to preach the Gospel and heal the wounds of aching hearts" (Brien 2016: 32). Fr. Popiełuszko served in several parishes throughout his ministry, including Holy Trinity in Ząbki, Our Lady Queen of Poland in Anin, and various Warsaw parishes, such as Infant Jesus, St. Anne's, and St. Stanislaus Kostka (Kindziuk 2014).

Beginning in August 1980, Popiełuszko became actively involved in supporting workers during the Solidarity strikes. His life's mission, as reflected in the message on his commemorative card, was to live among those who were marginalized and suffering. At that time, these were the workers associated with Solidarity, who were under



constant surveillance by the communist regime. Fr. Popiełuszko was outspoken in his criticism of the communist regime's abuses, yet he also urged people not to give in to hatred, adhering to the principle of "overcoming evil with good." From early 1982, he began regularly celebrating Masses for the homeland, which drew thousands of participants. His influence grew steadily, making him a significant figure not only among the faithful but also within Polish society as a whole (Litka 2009).

The communist authorities of the Polish People's Republic repeatedly falsely accused Fr. Popiełuszko of engaging in political activities against "Polish and Soviet friendship." The Security Service had begun monitoring him while he was still in seminary, and by the mid-1970s, they had already identified him as a potential candidate for collaboration with the regime (Litka 2009). Given that Father Jerzy Popiełuszko refused to collaborate, and his Christian-patriotic activities earned him widespread respect and admiration, the Security Service launched operations against him under the code names "Popiel" and "Godot" (Litka 2009). These efforts culminated in his brutal and premeditated murder.

On October 19, 1984, while returning from Bydgoszcz to Warsaw, Father Popiełuszko was detained by Security Service officers. He was savagely beaten and tortured before being placed in a sack filled with stones and thrown into the Vistula River from a dam in Włocławek. He died a martyr's death (Kindziuk 2014). The official date of his death is recorded as October 19, 1984, according to the findings of the so-called Toruń trial. However, prosecutor Andrzej Witkowski, a key figure in the case, believes that Father Jerzy was tortured for several days by Soviet forces, suggesting that his suffering may have lasted not a few hours, but several days (Gromadzki, Witkowski 2022). Both the photographs from the post-mortem examination and the forensic results confirmed the extreme cruelty and savagery of his killers. On June 6, 2010, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko was officially declared Blessed by the Catholic Church.



## Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko as a role model in education for Christian maturity (with particular emphasis on conscientiousness)

Jerzy Popiełuszko approached every task he undertook with unwavering commitment. As his mother, Marianna, noted, he was deeply focused and conscientious in fulfilling his daily duties (Kindziuk 2014: 24). From the day of his First Communion, he attended church every morning, even before school, to assist the priest during Mass as an altar boy. It is important to recognize that he not consider this to be a special sacrifice but rather as a natural duty for any boy raised in a household with a strong Catholic faith (Sikorska 1991: 5).

For educators, Fr. Jerzy serves as an inspiring example of how to nurture authentic Christian maturity in young people. Even as a child, his daily participation in Mass helped shape the foundational elements of his maturity—particularly his conscientiousness—within the context of his special relationship with Christ. In this way, what Nowak describes as his “human” maturity evolved into Christian maturity through the adoption of a Christian lifestyle and a conscientious commitment to follow Christ.

As Jan Sochoń writes:

He exhibited ... signs of religious conscientiousness that were rare among other boys. Regardless of the weather, he attended Mass daily and was always ready to be close to Christ. While it is fair to assume that there was a good deal of youthful emotion in his attitude, there was also a trace of a lasting, consistent vision that shaped his thoughts and actions, no matter the difficulties he faced. (Sochoń 2010: 17)

In Popiełuszko’s case, as confirmed in his biography, his conscientiousness was rooted in the perspective of eternal life (Sikorska 1991: 5; Sochoń 2010: 17). Every day, he strove to overcome personal flaws—whether passivity, discouragement, or weakness—to draw closer to Christ. This closeness found its fullest expression in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which he pursued with unwavering dedication.

At this point, it is worth noting the role of conscientiousness in the development of personal maturity. Although sometimes overlooked in favor of traits like creativity and assertiveness, conscientiousness



is one of the most vital qualities to cultivate in young people. Its significance in understanding human behavior is underscored by the Five-Factor Model of Personality (the “Big Five”), which identifies conscientiousness as one of the five key personality traits, alongside agreeableness, openness to experience, extraversion, and neuroticism).

John Oldham and Lois Morris recognized the vital role of conscientiousness in an individual’s constructive psychosocial functioning. After decades of studying traits that are key to understanding a person’s emotions, behavior, and thought patterns (Oldham, Morris 2020), they developed a concept of personality presented in their book *Your Psychological Self-Portrait: Why You Feel, Love, Think, and Act the Way You Do*. They argue that conscientiousness is the “backbone” of societies that value a strong work ethic. Key aspects of conscientiousness—such as dedication to work, the ability to make intense and purposeful effort, and a love of order and neatness—are the basis of any effective action. Additionally, Oldham and Morris argue that conscientiousness is a prerequisite for maintaining fulfilling social relationships, including romantic and marital ones. Therefore, they advocate that special attention should be given to cultivating this trait in young people as part of their journey to personal maturity.

In Poland, researchers such as Jan Ciecuch and Ewa Topolewska-Siedzik (2020) have also studied the importance of conscientiousness. They conducted studies on personality development during adolescence, focusing on the theoretical foundations and empirical validation of the Circular Model of Identity Formation. Their research demonstrated that conscientiousness—defined as reliability, consistency, and diligence—alongside openness to experience, plays a major role in the healthy psychosocial adjustment of adolescents. Given these findings, it is important to highlight the significance of conscientiousness for an individual’s successful adaptation, personality development, and overall lifestyle. Nowak, in developing his concept of Christian maturity, also identifies conscientiousness as one of the most essential qualities for fulfilling authentically human plans.

The biographical analysis of Popiełuszko’s childhood confirms that his dedication to regular and hard work was strongly ingrained in his close relationship with Christ. He entrusted his daily struggles and weariness to Him, providing a valuable lesson for those supporting others in their journey toward maturity. Father Jerzy exemplifies



how, for a Christian, the most fruitful work on one's conscientiousness yields the greatest results when living in a close relationship with Christ.

When teaching young people about conscientiousness, it is very important to avoid encouraging an excessive focus on themselves—on their own ego and pursuit of perfection. In other words, conscientiousness should not become an end in itself. History offers examples of individuals with strong will, power and reliability, whose actions were driven by selfish or even anti-social motives (Chlewiński 1991: 8). Therefore, conscientiousness, self-discipline, and self-control should never be pursued solely for their own sake. Popiełuszko serves as an exemplary model of someone who viewed conscientiousness as a means to a higher end—Christian maturity. His actions revealed a clear hierarchy of values, where lower motives were always subordinated to higher ones, with eternal life as the ultimate goal.

### Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko as a role model in education for Christian maturity (with emphasis on authenticity)

Authenticity is reflected in sincerity, love of truth, and the absence of falsehood and hypocrisy. An authentic person matches their actions with their words, meaning they live according to what they profess. As Popiełuszko wrote in one of his letters, “May we be accompanied, on a daily basis, by the awareness that, if we demand the truth from others, we ourselves must live the truth. If we demand justice, we ourselves must be just. If we demand courage and fortitude, we ourselves must be brave and courageous every day” (Popiełuszko 1985: 48). At just nineteen, Jerzy Popiełuszko demonstrated his commitment to bravery and courage through his actions. While serving at the military unit for seminary students in Bartoszyce, he resisted the pressures of communist propaganda and remained true to his values.

During this time, the communists used military service as a means to monitor seminary students. Their goal was to undermine the Catholic Church in Poland by reducing the number of future priests. To achieve this, they employed various forms of persuasion, as well as psychological and physical violence. The so-called “political training” was a method of indoctrination, aimed at instilling ideas



contrary to religious beliefs and Christian doctrine, and promoting a Marxist worldview (Sochoń 2010: 24). The presence of communist Security Service agents in the army further intensified these efforts.

Jerzy Popiełuszko quickly drew attention from his superiors due to his notable piety and leadership among the seminarians. To break his resolve, they subjected him to severe harassment: cleaning the camp toilets while wearing a gas mask, crawling on the ground for hours in full uniform, and enduring brutal “swimming lessons” (Sochoń 2010: 26). In one of his letters to his spiritual father, Fr. Czesław Miętek, Popiełuszko described an incident that left a lasting impression on him:

Recently, there have been some events that will stay with me, and I've even noted them down. One was the issue with the military rosary ... It began when the platoon commander ordered me to remove the rosary from my finger during class, in front of the entire platoon. I refused, which meant I disobeyed the order and faced the consequences. If I had taken it off, it would have seemed like a concession. The mere fact of taking it off is seemingly nothing. But I always look deeper. (Bartoszewski 2009: 21–22)

It is important to teach students that Christian maturity often comes through facing various challenges. There are times when people may be tempted to give up or question the value of further struggle, especially when they start to face significant costs. It is worth citing Popiełuszko's words about the rosary: “The mere fact of taking it off is seemingly nothing.” Many would have trivialized the struggle, but Popiełuszko understood that the fight for significant values often starts with small acts of resistance. He recognized that even seemingly minor challenges have deeper meanings, as he noted, “But I always look deeper.”

In education for Christian maturity, it is important to understand that defending the truth can come at a steep cost. Popiełuszko experienced this most acutely towards the end of his life, when he was tortured shortly before his death. However, even years earlier, while in the military unit in Bartoszyce, he had already encountered the Security Service—people who were violent and thrived on preying on those under their control. His refusal to remove his rosary illustrates his sincerity and integrity, showing that his actions were



consistent with his beliefs and free from pretense or hypocrisy. His behavior was utterly consistent with the principles he upheld.

The commander then ordered me to go with him to the higher authorities ... Since they were absent, he spoke to me alone. He threatened me with the prosecutor and mocked me, saying, “What, a fighter for the faith?” But that was nothing. At 5:45 p.m., in full uniform ..., I was taken to the NCO’s office. The interrogation lasted until 8:00 p.m., with a break for dinner. At 8:00 p.m., I was brought before the platoon commander. That’s when it began. First, he took down my details. Then he ordered me to take off my shoes, remove the laces, and unroll my foot wraps. So, I stood barefoot in front of him, at attention, like a convict. (Bartoszewski 2009: 22)

Authenticity allows a person to discover the truth about themselves and the surrounding world, as well as to recognize objective values. It is linked to the ability of an honest insight into one’s own motivations—being true to oneself. An authentic person perceives their motivations accurately and sees themselves as they truly are, neither attributing qualities they do not possess nor undervaluing their worth (Chlewiński 1991: 31). For most people, genuine self-insight is often obstructed by the frequent use of defense mechanisms, which serve to deny one’s flaws. This denial typically occurs through rationalization and the suppression of unwanted content from consciousness, with the aim of creating an idealized self-image of a personality that does not actually exist.

Fr. Popiełuszko’s biographers unanimously emphasize that he was the exact opposite of a hypocrite. They draw our attention to his perfect authenticity and naturalness (Sikorska 1991; Sochoń 2010; Kindziuk 2014). An authentic person, who has a reliable insight into themselves, neither overestimates their self-worth, or underestimates it. This is the goal in the process of upbringing: to help young people recognize their own strengths.

In a letter to Father Miętek, written while he was still a seminarian, Popiełuszko reflects on his encounter with the supervisors of the military unit in Bartoszyce:

I have proved to be very tough, I cannot be broken by threats or torture. Maybe it’s a good thing that it happened to be me, because maybe someone else would have broken down and still others would have followed him ... Thank you very much for your letter and words of encouragement. Yes, words of encouragement, because at times I had some doubts



as to whether I was really doing the right thing by resisting them and suffering for others. I was wondering if this might have been some kind of recklessness on my part. (Bartoszewski 2009: 21)

Seminarian Jerzy Popiełuszko was fully aware of his steadfastness and courage, yet he did not boast about these qualities. He was authentic in recognizing and acknowledging his attributes, without exaggerating or downplaying his value. He consciously decided to stand up for the truth in all circumstances. This commitment was supported by the literature he read, especially the booklet *The Imitation of Christ*, which he always carried with him. He wrote to his spiritual father:

Thank you very much, Father, for *The Imitation of Christ*. It is a very handy booklet, which is why I always keep it in my pocket. During the political classes, which we are all fed up with, I can turn to it and follow the beautiful thoughts it contains. (Bartoszewski 2009: 20)

This quotation illustrates the attitude of the most faithful and courageous priests who remained true to their beliefs despite the hypocritical reality surrounding them. In the heart of communist propaganda, within the military camp, they constantly carried items such as rosaries, medallions, and books, symbolizing their closeness to Christ (Żaryn 2022). This example is particularly valuable for young people following Fr. Jerzy's example, as it demonstrates everyday, authentic Christian maturity under difficult conditions. Jerzy Popiełuszko lived what he preached. His Christian maturity was genuine, even in the face of years of intimidation by the Security Service, which repeatedly interrogated and tormented him. Ultimately, he was brutally murdered, becoming a symbol of heroism.

### Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko as a role model in education for Christian maturity (with special emphasis on courage)

Courage is a conscious and bold response to danger. A courageous person is able to face danger bravely, steadfastly, and without fear (Żywczok 2021: 64). Popiełuszko's courage, just like his authenticity, was evident when he was sent as a seminary student to a special military unit in Bartoszyce, Masuria for two years. His refusal to remove his rosary during this time illustrates his determination:



At 10:20 p.m., a political officer came in and ordered me to take off my rosary. Why, I thought, why should I? It wasn't bothering anyone, and I wasn't about to remove it just because someone couldn't stand the sight of it. (Bartoszewski 2009: 23)

In guiding others toward maturity, it is worth following the example of Jerzy Popiełuszko, who responded boldly and firmly to the demand to remove his rosary. His actions show that the courageous defense of one's highest values is not only possible but necessary. His words further prove his courage and determination to stand firm in his faith:

Some corporal, trying to impress an officer, told me to take off my rosary, saying it wasn't a wedding ring, so I couldn't wear it in the army. I replied, "That depends for whom." He got angry and wanted to take me to the officer. The other guys were ready to attack him; I thought they were going to beat him up. I told them to have the officer come to me, because I wouldn't go to him. Why should I? Just because he told me to do so? (Bartoszewski 2009: 25)

Despite the intimidation he faced, Popiełuszko remained steadfast and brave, as these words attest.

The platoon commander ordered the squad leader to bring me in for the next interrogation with an RKM<sup>1</sup> machine gun, which weighs 16 kg, around my neck. The interrogation won't last three hours, but four to five hours, using "appropriate methods." I'm supposed to be subjected to the court of colleagues as a rebel, but, fortunately, I have good friends on that "court." (Bartoszewski 2009: 23)

Popiełuszko was entirely at the mercy of his military interrogators. When someone with questionable morals is given unlimited power, the temptation to become authoritarian, arrogant, and abusive is strong. Abraham Lincoln once said, "If you want to know a man's true character, give him power." This saying underscores how a person's true nature is revealed in situations where they hold power.

Seminarian Jerzy's letters from the military unit in Bartoszyce serve as a cautionary tale for young people: those in positions of authority should never force their subordinates into anything or insult their dignity. It is simply despicable to ridicule or demean others when they are completely dependent on us.

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1 RKM—light machine gun (Bartoszewski 2009: 23).



During the communist regime in which human dignity was routinely violated, finding oneself in the hands of its representatives was a shocking and traumatic experience for many. This is evident in Popiełuszko's letter to his spiritual father, where he describes the behavior of his army superior:

He started venting his anger, using various tactics. He tried to ridicule and humiliate me in front of my peers, then attempted to bribe me with promises of leaves and passes. I was forced to stand barefoot for an hour (60 minutes). My feet were frozen and bruised, and finally, at 9:20 p.m., he made me put my shoes back on. He left the room briefly and went to talk to the guys from my platoon. When he returned, he had a surprising message: "There, in the hall, they are praying for you." Indeed, the boys were praying the rosary together. I stayed silent, reciting prayers in my mind, and offering the suffering—from the crushing weight of the rucksack, mask, gun, and helmet—to God as atonement for sins: "God, how light the suffering feels when one knows they are suffering for Christ." (Bartoszewski 2009: 22–23)

In this difficult and dramatic moment, Jerzy Popiełuszko offered his humiliation to God. For young people, this demonstrates that suffering and humiliation are easier to endure for those who maintain a close relationship with God. The prayers of his colleagues also provided Popiełuszko with spiritual support.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that in his daily life, Popiełuszko first strengthened his sense of conscientiousness, followed by his authenticity and courage, all within the framework of his pursuit of salvation. Even under brutal torture, just before his martyrdom, he remained faithful to Christ.

## Conclusions

Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko serves as a powerful role model, who shows that in raising a mature Christian, it is essential to strengthen the qualities of conscientiousness, authenticity, and courage within the context of striving for salvation. These qualities enable one to achieve even the most difficult life plans. Fr. Popiełuszko's life confirms that Christian maturity is more of a lifelong journey than a fixed state. It is attained by overcoming the trials that life presents. Staying close to Christ provides the strength needed to emerge victorious from these challenges.



In the future, it would be valuable to explore the later periods of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko's life using the biographical method, to better understand how he continued to shape his Christian maturity.

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