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Introduction

In the title of his 2014 publication, Professor Zbigniew Marek SJ posed the following question to all readers, especially pedagogues: “Religion – help or threat to education?” The author did not intend to give an unambiguous answer to this question, but provided both theoreticians and practitioners with a kind of catalyst for reflection on the fundamental and ultimate issue that every person has to face, though one they are aware of to varying degrees.

Although almost ten years have passed since then, this question has not lost any of its relevance; on the contrary, due to the growing interest in spirituality in pedagogy – both natural and religious – it has only become more so. As in the above-mentioned publication, the authors of this volume do not claim the right, nor do they feel obliged, to answer the question of religion’s place in education in a single, correct way.

Invited by educational practice, academic discourse, and the media, we present to you a volume of nine articles reflecting on human religiosity and spirituality, seen from the individual and societal perspectives and in the pedagogical context. The authors of all texts are guided by a deeply humanistic and personalistic vision

of humanity. They see people as willing and able to explore their spiritual nature. Reading these texts, we can conclude that they have the well-being and harmonious development of their pupils at heart. The authors refer to various pedagogical concepts, the functioning of specific groups of people, and the cognitively and educationally significant contribution of individual thinkers.

The concept of religion consists of many referents, and Christianity is one of them. In the texts included in this volume, Christianity has largely become the research perspective, which is why the first text (Eugeniusz Sakowicz) opens with a reflection on Christianity as a religion. Its author shows the understanding of religion in general and Christianity in particular. A proper understanding of the essence of religion, including Christianity, which is focused on the Trinity God, Jesus Christ and man, is indicated. Among other things, this exposes the manipulation of religion in social and political life. Getting to know Christianity as a religion can be a preparation for intercultural, interreligious, and ecumenical dialogue. The reference to Christianity draws attention to the fact that education is also understood holistically: as education, upbringing, teaching, and learning. This point of view of the relationship between education and religion is shown in the following articles, even when they do not directly refer to Christianity.

As part of the reflection on religiosity and spirituality in education, it was noted that learning the Gospel and the principles of its interpretation can bring about synergistic effects in the educational process (Anna Walulik). Synergy is understood here as cooperation, the effect of which is not only desirable values being strengthened or undesirable phenomena being weakened, but a new quality emerging.

The next article (Zbigniew Marek) presents pedagogical support for development through accompaniment in the Ignatian perspective, also known as Jesuit pedagogy, which is based on a theocentric and Christocentric vision of humankind and our existence in the world. The spirituality stemming from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is reflected in everyday educational activities, as is the use of this pedagogy.

The next text (Aneta M. Kamińska) presents a specific group of gifted people and shows that religion is an important factor in their lives. Religion has been an indispensable element on the path to

personal maturity and comprehensive development of many gifted people. Faith in God allows them to discover the meaning of life, to define their own goals, and to achieve them successfully. Faith strengthens their sense of security and experience of individual fulfillment and protects them from repeating destructive patterns of behavior.

In the next article (Aleksandra Sander), the system of values of young Germans and the position of religiosity and religious education in state schools are also depicted. Examples of legal and practical solutions regarding teaching religion and ethics in individual lands of the Federal Republic of Germany are also shown.

Particularly noteworthy are the articles in which the importance of religious and spiritual reflection of thinkers is presented through different periods of history. Their work, activities and, above all, their lives show the value of religion and what it brings to the educational process. The authors search for the meaning that personal roles in education have for values and they show the importance of testimony in pedagogical reflection.

This section also honors Jadwiga Zamoyska, who was selected by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland as one of the patrons of the year 2023, and whose centenary of death falls in November this year. She was thus, in a way, saved from oblivion. Jadwiga Zamojska was very keen on the proper upbringing of the youth, for whom she drew up a curriculum. She wanted to educate children and young people in the Catholic spirit. In this context, the article dedicated to her (Iwona Jazukiewicz) reflects on the value of integral human development.

The next text (Bożena Sieradzka-Baziur) presents the structure and semantics of the religious text *Alone With God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray*, written by Janusz Korczak. This text highlights Korczak's interest in spirituality. The author considered many of the prayers in it to be the utterances of his ancestors, dictated to him by his parents, which expresses his belief in the importance of the heritage of the past in spiritual development.

In the next article (Dorota A. Kowalewska), selected texts by St. Augustine and other sources interpreting his teaching in various contexts are analyzed. Based on the source texts, a distinction is made between such concepts as knowledge and wisdom, inner and outer man, and reason and heart. The insufficiency of words in the

process of transmitting values by the educator is also pointed out. The analysis made it possible to determine the goal of teaching, which, according to St. Augustine, is to acquire wisdom through love. In the final part, the concept of the “inner teacher” is presented, helping to internalize the knowledge of non-sensory things.

In the last article (Weronika Juroszek), the figure of Blessed Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko motivated the search for how to educate young people to become mature Christians today. The deliberations refer to Marian Nowak's concept of Christian maturity.

These individual articles show many shades of understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and education. Thus, they indicate the complexity of the subject matter and its depth and importance for contemporary pedagogical reflection. Investigating the potential of religion shows the validity of its presence in the educational process. The authors' thoughts can inspire a new search for answers about the place of religion in education and its role in solving current personal and social problems.

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