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**Education and Religion**

Edukacja i religia



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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 Zamojska, 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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## **Wprowadzenie**

W tytule swojej publikacji wydanej w 2014 roku Profesor Zbigniew Marek SJ postawił wszystkim czytelnikom, a zwłaszcza pedagogom, pytanie: „Religia – pomoc, czy zagrożenie dla edukacji?” Autor nie zamierzał w niej udzielić jednoznacznej odpowiedzi na to pytanie, lecz dostarczyć zarówno teoretykom, jak i praktykom, swego rodzaju impulsu do refleksji nad zasadniczymi, ostatecznymi kwestiami, wobec których staje każdy człowiek, choć w różnym stopniu je sobie uświadamia.

Mimo że od tamtej pory minęło prawie 10 lat, pytanie to nie straciło swojej aktualności, a wręcz przeciwnie, z uwagi na rosnące w pedagogice zainteresowanie duchowością – zarówno w wymiarze naturalnym, jak i religijnym, tylko zyskało. Podobnie jak we wspomnianej publikacji, autorzy tekstów zamieszczonych w niniejszym zeszycie naszego czasopisma nie roszczą sobie prawa ani nie czują się zobowiązani do udzielania jedynej słusznej odpowiedzi na pytanie o miejsce religii w edukacji.

Zaproszeni zarówno praktyką edukacyjną, dyskursem akademickim, jak i medialnym, przekazujemy do Państwa lektury opracowanie zawierające dziewięć artykułów, których przedmiotem jest

namysł nad religijnością i duchowością człowieka w ujęciu jednostkowym i społecznym w kontekście pedagogicznym. Autorom wszystkich tekstów przyświeca głęboko humanistyczna i personalistyczna wizja człowieka. Ujmują go jako kogoś, kto jest skłonny i zdolny do zgłębiania własnej duchowej natury. Lektura ich tekstów pozwala stwierdzić, że leży im na sercu dobro wychowanków i ich harmonijny rozwój. Autorzy odnoszą się do różnych koncepcji pedagogicznych, funkcjonowania specyficznych grup osób oraz istotnego poznawczo i wychowawczo wkładu poszczególnych myślicieli.

Na pojęcie religii składa się wiele desygnatów, a chrześcijaństwo jest jednym z nich. W tekstach umieszczonych w niniejszym zeszycie to właśnie chrześcijaństwo w dużej mierze stało się perspektywą badawczą, dlatego pierwszy tekst (Eugeniusz Sakowicz) otwiera refleksja nad chrześcijaństwem jako religią. Ukazano w nim rozumienie religii w ogóle i chrześcijaństwa w szczególności. Wskazano na właściwe zrozumienie istoty religii, w tym chrześcijaństwa, które skoncentrowane jest na Bogu w Trójcy Jedynym i Jezusie Chrystusie oraz człowieku. Pozwala to m.in. demaskować manipulacje religią w życiu społecznym i politycznym. Poznanie chrześcijaństwa jako religii może stanowić przygotowanie do dialogu interkulturowego, międzyreligijnego oraz ekumenicznego. Odwołanie się do chrześcijaństwa zwraca uwagę na to, że również edukacja rozumiana jest holistycznie – jako kształcenie, wychowanie, nauczanie i uczenie się. Taki punkt widzenia związków pomiędzy edukacją i religią ukazują kolejne artykuły, także wtedy, gdy wprost do chrześcijaństwa nie nawiązują.

W ramach refleksji nad religijnością i duchowością w edukacji zauważono, że poznanie treści Ewangelii i zasad jej interpretacji pozwala na korzystanie z efektów synergicznych w procesie wychowania (Anna Walulik). Synergia jest tu rozumiana jako współdziałanie, którego efektem jest nie tylko wzmacnianie pożądanych wartości lub osłabianie niepożądanych zjawisk, lecz pojawianie się nowej jakości.

W kolejnym artykule (Zbigniew Marek) ukazano możliwość pedagogicznego wspomagania rozwoju poprzez towarzyszenie w perspektywie ignacjańskiej, zwane też pedagogiką jezuicką, której specyfika opiera się na teocentrycznej i chrystocentrycznej wizji człowieka i jego egzystencji w świecie. Refleksji poddana została

duchowość wyrastająca z ćwiczeń duchowych św. Ignacego Loyoli, a także wykorzystanie tej pedagogiki w codziennych oddziaływaniach wychowawczych.

W następnym tekście (Aneta M. Kamińska) przedstawiono specyficzną grupę osób zdolnych i pokazano, że dla tej grupy religia jest istotnym czynnikiem w ich życiu. Okazało się, że jest ona nieodzownym elementem na drodze do dojrzałości osobowej i wszechstronnego rozwoju wielu osób zdolnych. Wiara w Boga pozwala im odkrywać sens życia, pomaga określać własne cele i pomyślnie je realizować. Wiara umacnia ich w poczuciu bezpieczeństwa i doświadczeniu indywidualnego spełnienia oraz chroni od powielania destrukcyjnych zachowań.

W kolejnym tekście zobrazowano system wartości młodych Niemców (Aleksandra Sander) oraz pozycję, jaką zajmuje w nim religijność i nauczanie religii w szkołach państwowych. Pokazane zostały również formalne i praktyczne rozwiązania dotyczące nauczania religii i etyki w poszczególnych krajach związkowych Niemieckiej Republiki Federalnej.

Na szczególną uwagę zasługują artykuły, w których autorzy przedstawiają wagę religijnej i duchowej refleksji myślicieli z różnych okresów historii. W ich twórczości, działalności, a przede wszystkim w ich życiu, ukazano wartość religii oraz to, co wnosi ona w procesy edukacji. Poszczególni autorzy poszukują znaczenia ról osobowych w wychowaniu do wartości, pokazują znaczenie świadectwa w refleksji pedagogicznej.

W tej części ukazano postać Jadwigi Zamoyskiej, którą Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej wskazał wśród patronów roku 2023 i której setna rocznica śmierci przypada w listopadzie bieżącego roku. Została ona w ten sposób uhonorowana i poniekąd ocalona od zapomnienia. Jadwidze Zamoyskiej bardzo zależało na właściwym wychowaniu młodego pokolenia, dla którego sporządziła własny program wychowawczy. Chciała kształcić dzieci i młodzież w duchu katolickim. W tym kontekście autorka artykułu (Iwona Jazukiewicz) podejmuje refleksję nad wartością integralnego rozwoju człowieka.

W następnym artykule (Bożena Sieradzka-Baziur) przedstawiona została struktura i semantyka tekstu religijnego *Sam na sam z Bogiem. Modlitwy tych, którzy się nie modlą*, którego autorem jest Janusz Korczak. Tekst ten uwidacznia zainteresowania Korczaka duchowością,

a wiele modlitw w nim zawartych autor uznał za wypowiedzi przodków, podyktowane mu przez jego rodziców, w czym wyraża się jego przekonanie o przemożnym znaczeniu dziedzictwa przeszłości dla rozwoju duchowego człowieka.

W kolejnym tekście (Dorota A. Kowalewska) poddano analizie wybrane teksty św. Augustyna oraz inne źródła interpretujące jego naukę w różnych kontekstach. Na podstawie tekstów źródłowych rozróżniono takie pojęcia, jak wiedza i mądrość, człowiek wewnętrzny i zewnętrzny, rozum i serce. Wskazano również na niewystarczalność słów w procesie przekazywania przez pedagoga wartości. Przeprowadzona analiza pozwoliła na określenie celu nauczania, którym według św. Augustyna jest zdobycie mądrości poprzez miłość. W części końcowej tekstu przedstawiono koncepcję „nauczyciela wewnętrznego”, wspomagającego interioryzację wiedzy o rzeczach niemyślowych.

W ostatnim artykule (Weronika Juroszek) postać błogosławionego ks. Jerzego Popiełuszki stała się impulsem do poszukiwania, jak dzisiaj wychowywać młodzież do chrześcijańskiej dojrzałości. W rozważaniach odwołano się do koncepcji chrześcijańskiej dojrzałości autorstwa Mariana Nowaka.

Poszczególne teksty ukazują wiele odcieni rozumienia zagadnień lokujących się na styku religii i edukacji. Wskazują tym samym na złożoność podjętej tematyki oraz jej głębię i znaczenie dla współczesnej refleksji pedagogicznej. Sięgnięcie do potencjału, jaki tkwi w religii, ukazuje zasadność jej obecności w procesach wychowawczych. Przemyślenia autorów mogą stanowić inspirację do poszukiwania odpowiedzi na pytanie o miejsce religii w wychowaniu i jej rolę w rozwiązywaniu aktualnych problemów osobistych i społecznych.

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# Articles and dissertations

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Artykuły  
i rozprawy



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# Christianity as a Religion

## ABSTRACT

The subject of this text is religion in general and Christianity in particular. The aim is to show the essence of religion and the uniqueness of Christianity. The research issues concern the essence of religion, which is indicated by its definitions and functions. The following questions are addressed: What is religion? What are its components? What elements constitute it? In the article, the methods of critical analysis of texts and phenomenological and synthetic analysis were used.

The proper understanding of religion as such, including Christianity, which is focused on the Triune God and Jesus Christ and man, has a number of implications in everyday life. Therefore, it is necessary to know the essence of religion and the nature of Christianity in order to unmask attempts at manipulating religion in social and political life. Getting to know Christianity as a religion can prepare one for intercultural, interreligious, and ecumenical dialogue. What is important here is theoretical preparation, which provides the basis for active, practical involvement in the process of dialogue and education, not only of the younger generation.

## Introduction

The thesis in the title of this study, “Christianity as a religion,” may seem overtly obvious. However, the verb “seems” suggests a certain difficulty in describing the essence of religion and presenting Christianity as an example. Religion is typically defined by

### KEYWORDS

religion, definition of religion, Christianity, essence of religion, specific features of Christianity, uniqueness of Christianity, universal nature of Christianity

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people who believe in God, as well as by those who distance themselves from it or deny it altogether. Often, the latter group has experienced a religious phase in their life, which they have abandoned due to various events or reflections. Researchers who do not identify with any religion often believe that their statements about belief systems are more objective, as they are not influenced by personal, non-rational experiences.

Therefore, there are two narratives or “stories” about religion throughout history. One is given by believers, including zealots, saints, philosophers, and theologians. The other comes from atheists, militant anti-theists, agnostics, and humanists who are indifferent to religious experiences. Descriptions of religion can be conveyed with strong emotions, both positive and negative. Statements about religion are analyzed from the perspectives of various sciences, including psychology and medicine.

According to naturalistic interpretations provided by neurology or psychiatry, transcendence is considered a “product,” of chemical processes and electromagnetic interactions in the brain and the human central nervous system. So-called neurotheology, which points to a purely biological source of religion, is gaining popularity among opponents of religion. Neurotheology aligns closely with the social and economic theory of the origins of religion, which has been popular in recent decades. According to neurotheology, God, deities, and the world of transcendence are merely the effects or “images” of various reactions occurring in the brain. Even if there is a higher being or Supreme Being, it only exists in the human brain and not “outside” it. Thus, neurotheology is the modern embodiment of mythology.

The debate over the essence of religion, and particularly its existence or non-existence, has raged for centuries. Often, defenders and apologists of religion are individuals who have an existential connection to it, and who find meaning in their lives or liberation from various forms of oppression through it. Religion has always been embraced by holy people—those who are acutely aware of their imperfections and who steadfastly pursue what is beyond or greater and more powerful than themselves. They understand religion to be the most comprehensive and reliable answer to questions about the meaning of human life, birth, suffering, and death.

Perhaps the greatest experts in religion are the mystics. They appear in nearly all religious traditions, both Christian and non-Christian. Their words bear witness to profound spiritual experiences, often conveyed through poetic language. Often, their silence speaks volumes about religion:

Mystical experiences represent a distinct type of religious encounter. ... Mysticism is regarded as an experience that is not universally accessible and requires specific predispositions .... The mystic, in their pursuit, transcends or diminishes their own self and capabilities, striving to merge or unite—depending on the tradition—with the sacred cosmos, divine harmony, deity, the sacred, truth, the principle of existence and order, and so on. (Maciuszko 1992: 91)

Religions do not exist in isolation. There is no spiritual or material reality that exists as “pure religion.” It always takes on a specific, embodied form, rooted in the here and now of reality and referring to an extra-sensory reality.

The term “religion,” which originates from Latin, is widely recognized in various languages worldwide, particularly in Western cultures and regions influenced by them, such as the United States. Wherever humans have dwelled, religion has also been present, though not always designated by the term popularized by Latin civilization (Lanczkowski 1986: 29–35). Even cultures and civilizations divergent from the Western tradition have their own concepts for denoting the relationship between man (humanity) and God (deity), yet the phenomenon of religion is universal. “There has never been a culture in the past, nor does it seem there will be one in the future, that lacks religion,” Erich Fromm asserted in his work *Essays on the Sociology of Religion* (Fromm 1966: 134). Similar sentiments have been expressed by other scholars who study religion.

## Religion and its essence

Questions about the essence of religion are often straightforward: What is religion? What makes up religion? What are its components? Understanding these questions becomes clearer when we first explore a negative form of inquiry: What is not religion? These are complex questions, all the more so since they are not abstract but tied to specific issues and contexts.

## What is not religion?

First and foremost, religion is not magic (Zmorzanka, Pindel 2006: 794–801), which can manifest in various forms, from “black” to “white” magic. In magic, the focus is on the human being. God, deity, or any other supernatural force essentially has no power. In magic, the human practitioner is the one who directs both human and non-human destinies. They act as the “stage designer,” who arranges props and artefacts according to their own vision, and they wield divine forces that ultimately remain under their control. Through a series of ritual actions, the practitioner wants to dominate deities, higher beings, and even the world of spirits.

Magic is the negation of religion, for the latter canters on God, who is beyond human control. The will of God is the ultimate authority in religion. Magic, on the other hand, involves human efforts to control the divine. Magical elements can sometimes infiltrate religions, including those believed to have divine origins. When this occurs, it suggests an internal erosion or distortion of the religion. In such cases, the transcendent is brought into the realm of the mundane. There is a confusion of the ontological order. In magic, “the Great Unknown,” meaning God or the deity as defined by various religions, becomes recognized and deciphered by the practitioner. There is no longer any mystery in the supernatural, for it is understood and manipulated by the human being.

Religion is not an ideology. When religion is used as a tool for social control and manipulation by religious leaders or other leaders (both global and local), it contradicts the essence of religion itself. This approach is a form of violence against religion, aimed at ruling over others without respecting their freedom. A religion that serves an ideological role by manipulating human emotions in order to achieve goals known only to the manipulators loses its true purpose. It becomes a sham religion, a quasi-religion, pretending to perform sacred functions. Ideologies often incorporate elements of religion and its doctrine as building blocks for a system that performs extra-religious tasks. Religion transformed into an ideology highlights its institutional dimension, with leaders who claim to have the authority of God himself. Such a transformation poses a significant threat to communities, as it justifies and legitimizes hatred, violence,

and cruelty (most evident during wars) or terrorism. In extreme cases, acts of hatred become almost acts of worship.

According to the utopian system of Marxism-Leninism, religion is merely a result or product of the social class struggle. Religion, this system believed, formed and came into being from the clash between the ruling classes and the masses of poor, powerless people. The “professors” of these totalitarian systems claimed that religions would disappear with the eradication of social classes and the formation of a single classless society with common property, including shared spouses and material objects (Sakowicz 2022: 245–263). Today, we can see that this was a completely false vision of religion.

Ideologues of dialectical materialism proclaimed for decades that religion is a “reflection of the real world that was made a fantasy” (Sakowicz 2015: 85–104). They believed that religions are dangerous for their adherents, as they transport them into a world of fiction, filled with supposedly imaginary facts. Consequently, religions were seen as a kind of asylum for the despairing: places of “refuge” and consolation in the face of traumatic experiences. The thesis of the naturalistic origin of religion, as the invention of a frightened person fearing not only a ruthless ruler but also natural phenomena, contradicts the idea of transcendence. This perspective is a kind of “confession of disbelief” set against a declaration of faith.

Religion is not a product of evolution. With the theory of biological evolutionism (Zon 1983: 1449–1451), which emerged in the 19th century, came the “mirror” theory of the genesis of religions, suggesting that religions developed similarly to living organisms (Sobczak, Zimoń: 1454–1457). This led to the belief in the linear development of religion, progressing through successive stages of “self-improvement” and increasing “subtlety”: from polytheism to monotheism. Intermediate stages, in varying order, such as pantheism (the belief that the whole world is a deity or “god”) or henotheism (the worship of one supreme deity among many), also emerged.

Although Charles Darwin was not an atheist, the evolutionist theory of the origin of religion eliminated God as the main “cause” of religion and negated its revelatory origin, which says that man is at the root of religion, and ultimately a source of evolution. According to evolutionism, religions are akin to biological organisms: they are born, develop, reach their full potential, give rise to new forms, and

eventually die. Thus, religions are absolutely subject to the law of life and death. Over time, this led to the development of the sub-discipline of religious studies known as the thanatology of religions, which describes the processes of the dying and annihilation of religions.

If religion is not magic, ideology, or a fiction generated by fear and trepidation of the unknown or the absolute, nor is it a product of evolution, then what is it?

## What is religion?

Religion is “a phenomenon defined in various ways and described from many perspectives” (Bronk 2003: 393). Richard Pauli’s *Das Wesen der Religion*, published in 1947, included 150 definitions of religion (Pauli 1947). Marian Rusecki, in his encyclopaedic article “Religion,” published in the *Lexicon of Fundamental Theology* in 2002, mentions nearly 200 definitions of religion, adding that “many of them are close to each other” (Rusecki 2002: 1020). If another author were to note the existence of 300 definitions of religion, they would probably be right. To sum up, we may say that there are as many definitions of religion as there are people.

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, nominal definitions relating to religion were formulated, often linked to the etymology of the term. The philosopher and speaker Cicero (died in 43 BC) derived the word *religio* from the verb *relegere*, meaning “to read anew” or “to conscientiously observe.” He defined religion as “the conscientious observance of all that belongs to the worship of the gods,” with its essence expressed in discerning from the cosmos man’s duties towards God. Religion, therefore, is “the scrupulous worship of the gods” (Berner 1997: 392).

The Christian writer and apologist Lactantius (d. 330) derived the term *religio* from the word *religare*, meaning “the reconnection of man with God,” highlighting the bond between man and God as the deepest meaning of religion. St. Augustine (d. 430) derived the term *religio* from the verb *religere*, meaning “to choose again.” For St. Augustine, true religion is that by which the soul reconciles itself anew with the God from whom it had previously separated. “The distinctiveness of the divine and human spheres,” as assumed by Cicero, Lactantius, and St. Augustine, “would find its continuation in the

distinction (opposition) between the spheres of the sacred and the profane. The Latin concept of religion originally had a legal-administrative tinge typical of Roman culture, unknown to non-European cultures” (Bronk 2003: 394).

The legacy of ancient thinkers has been carried into modern and contemporary times. Although today there are non-nominal definitions of religion—such as functional, indicating the tasks religion performs beyond strictly religious ones (aesthetic or integrative for a community); inductive, presenting common features of different religions while ignoring differences; and analytical, discussing the essential contents of a given religion—the ancient intuitions about the concept of “religion” remain valid (Karas 2002; Maciuszko 1992: 63–81).

One of the most universal definitions of religion, applicable to almost all belief systems (except for Buddhism, which says nothing about gods) (Dajczer 1993), focuses on the relationship between man and deity. Religion is man’s existential relationship to a Supernatural Being—this definition effectively and objectively distinguishes what constitutes a religion and what does not. According to this definition, a religion requires a subject and an object, and a reference between them, i.e. the relationship indicated above. “Speaking in the most general terms,” Zofia Józefa Zdybicka states, “a religious act is a human act, i.e. a conscious and purposeful behavior of man in which his personal relation to transcendent (sacral) reality is expressed and constituted, especially to the personally understood God” (Zdybicka 1977: 170–171). In religion, the subject is always a person. They represent the starting point of what we define as religion. The human being, in their entire condition, their psycho-physical structure, and as a unity of soul, spirit, and body (as emphasised by realistic philosophy), being a temporal, transient, fragile, and weak being in an existential-metaphysical sense, is confronted with the object of religion: the supernatural Being. This “object” cannot be conceived in a reistic manner, as a thing, or something material. It signifies human point of reference, pointing to a transcendent reality: eternal, imperishable, powerful—omnipotent, being the source and *raison d’être* of existence; both essence and existence, which cannot be said of any living being, including man.

“The existential relationship of man” points to the human person. The Roman logician and philosopher Boethius (d. 524) defined a person as “an individual substance of rational nature” (Krapiec 2006: 874). This term is unknown in other religious traditions. The concept of a human being (anthropology) varies in different religions, even in monotheistic ones (such as Christianity and Islam). A Buddhist will never say of themselves that they are a person. A Muslim will never claim likeness to God (Allah), as this would compromise the pure monotheism of which Islam is proud. Nor will a Muslim call God a person or address God as “Our Father.”

The category of a person and all that constitutes it, developed by Christian philosophy and theology, allows for the recognition of personal dignity, inalienable value, sovereignty of being, openness, primordial solitude, incompleteness, contingency, and fragility of existence in every individual. In relation to transcendence, man—despite his ontic frailty—always appears as a valuable being. He turns to God, engaging all spheres of his existence: reason, will, and emotions. The harmony between these “components” of the person points to his integration, making him responsible for his life and, therefore, responsible for his religion.

The subject matter of religion—the Supernatural Being—is known by various names across different religious or philosophical traditions, such as God, deity, and Supreme Being (in the beliefs of primitive peoples). Different religious systems identify God in various ways: the Triune God (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit), Yahweh, Allah, and Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu in Hinduism. Philosophy, which distances itself from divine revelation and seeks to explain religion and its reason for existence through reason, refers to the Absolute or the absolute being. The essence of man cannot be equated with the divine being, although some religious systems, such as Hindu thought or the contemporary syncretic New Age movement, attempt to equate man with the Supernatural Being.

The relationship between the subject (man) and the object of religion (deity) is inherently unequal. Man, guided by free will, reason, and emotions, reaches out towards the transcendent as an entity subordinated and subjected to it. This relationship is not one of partnership or rivalry.

The object of religion (God) cannot be understood in material terms. The Supernatural Being has no external (other than itself) source of existence. It has always existed and will always exist, characterised by the fullness of perfection, power, and holiness. It is the origin and purpose of all being. The philosopher of religion, Zofia Józefa Zdybicka, argues that

Religion is a system of man's relation to some supreme being or highest value, consciously expressed through specific behaviors: recognizing dependence, desiring worship, and striving for the closest possible connection with this being. Religion always involves a reference, directing man's relation "towards" a religious object which, in some way, completes human existence. (Zdybicka 1973: 9).

Similarly, the phenomenologist of religion, Tadeusz Dajczer (d. 2009), states:

Religion is the existential relationship of man to the Absolute, which man believes in, worships, and seeks for norms of conduct and salvation, expressed in social forms. (qtd. in Markowski 2013: 155–156)

Throughout the study of religion and various streams of Christian thought, there has been a tendency to contrast the concepts of religion and faith (Sakowicz 2020). Karl Barth (d. 1968), a Swiss Evangelical Reformed theologian and leading figure in Protestant dialectical theology, promoted a vision where religion and faith are seen as opposites. He argued that Christianity is not a religion but faith. In the Christianity initiated by God, founded by the Son of God—Jesus Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit (which is precisely why it is faith), man is in direct relationship with God. Here, God reaches out to man with a salvific initiative, and man responds in the way of faith and through faith. The self-revealing God motivates man to faith, whereas religion, according to Barth, is the bottom-up effort of man, who raises his hands upwards, searching for God, often in the dark, a state of wandering or being lost. Barth considered religions "the most absurd form of unbelief and idolatry, an expression of human pride and sin" (Dajczer 1990b: 46).

Each religious system has a number of functions. The most important is its theological role, which defines humanity's relationship to God, the Supernatural Being or deity. Religion also has the "secular" function of helping to integrate individuals within a specific

community, such as a national or ethnic community. It also fulfils an aesthetic role by cultivating an appreciation for beauty. Most importantly, every belief system contributes to forming and sustaining a community (Sakowicz 2007: 543–555). Religion plays a foundational role in shaping who people are. Even if someone identifies as a non-believer, they still benefit from the cultural impact of religion that has influenced the cultural environment they inhabit.

Religion is a part of culture (Sakowicz 2020: 219–221). According to the realistic philosophy upheld by the Catholic Church as “legitimate” and forming the “subsoil” of theology for centuries, values such as truth, goodness, beauty, and holiness (*sacrum*) are integral to culture and its primary currents. Truth is a value recognized and described by science. Culture is defined by morality, which is oriented towards goodness. Beauty belongs to the realm of art. Finally, holiness (*sacrum*) highlights religion as a domain of culture that is distinct from science, morality, and art.

Sociologist Émile Durkheim (d. 1917) argued that religion consists of doctrine, cult, morality, and institution. As the founder of the French sociological school, he viewed religion as a purely social phenomenon, tracing its roots, like those of morality and other intellectual categories and institutions, to social consciousness. Durkheim saw religion as a “product of social fear of unknown cosmic forces” (Jacher 1983: 375–376). He believed that religion and morality, through specific symbols, act as factors that consolidate communities. Durkheim equated religious phenomena with social structure and religious life with social life. According to him, society is the ultimate source of religion (Wroczyński 2001: 757–758). Although Durkheim attributed the origins of religion to naturalistic causes, his insights into the components of religion—doctrine, worship, morality, and institutions—can still be valuable to those with religious beliefs.

There is no religion without key doctrinal principles, or religious doctrine, such as God, deities, or the Supreme Being. Doctrine is what sets a religion apart from others and defines its uniqueness; therefore, it is by no means possible to put an equal sign between the doctrines of different religions. Doctrinal relativism is the greatest enemy of religion as such. Even though many religions use similar-sounding terms like God, revelation, salvation, man, and sin, they can by no means be directly compared. Religious doctrine can be

divided into three categories: “the theory of the deity (sacrum), the theories of the world, and the theory of man.” In other words, it covers statements about the sacrum, the world, and humanity—essentially theology (proper), cosmology, and anthropology (Maciuszko 1992: 98).

Morality, as a part of culture, also plays a crucial role in religion. Every religion has its own set of codified or catalogued norms of conduct. These norms can be universal, i.e. they oblige believers to act decently and respectfully toward others regardless of their religious identity and affiliation. In particularistic religions, which bring together specific groups (like a tribe), the moral rules apply only within that group and do not extend to outsiders.

The practice of religiousness, or living out and practicing the mysteries of faith, is expressed through worship. This can take various forms, including prayer, sacrifices, penitential acts, asceticism, adoration, both spoken and silent forms of devotion, and the performance of ceremonies. As Janusz Maciuszko (d. 2020) explains:

Worship is an inalienable part of religion and encompasses both individual and communal practices. It represents the externalisation, or the objectification—of internal religious experiences. The focus of worship is the sacrum in the forms inherent in different religions. Worship activities are directed towards these sacred elements with specific intentions, such as offering homage or making requests. Generally, there is a correspondence between the form of worship and the beliefs and norms of the society: activities that culturally approved. (Maciuszko 1992: 98)

The final component of religion is its institutional aspect, or what is commonly known as a religious organisation. Without an institutionalised form of religious life and practice, including a specific authority (often believed to be appointed by God, a deity, or the Supreme Being) over the community of faith, and without ritual specialists like priests, chiefs, or sorcerers, religion cannot endure over time and space. Joachim Wach, a sociologist and expert in religions (d. 1955), described this as the sociological expression of religious experience (Maciuszko 1992: 105). Janusz Maciuszko argues that: the communal and social institutionalization of religion is a response to the experience of the sacrum and is therefore a derivative of this foundational religious fact. Such processes are fostered by, among other things, factors like a shared community of worship and doctrinal

beliefs, common value systems among followers, approval of specific social structures and expressions, and the authority of religious leaders and reformers, including those who have passed away. Among these, the founders of religions hold a special place, as their teachings form the basis of the religion's existence and require a fundamental acceptance or rejection of their principles, since they normalize the entire religion (Maciuszko 1992: 105).

In summary, following Marian Rusecki (d. 2012), it can be said that:

In the anthropological and philosophical sense, religion is man's set of references to the invisible sacred and the transcendent. Our existential contingency creates an internal demand for such references, leading us to intuitively sense the possibility of another world that provides a permanent basis and meaning for human existence, and to remain open to it. (Rusecki 2012: 1394)

## Specific features of Christianity

In today's postmodern era in which relativism is one of the dominant trends, or even paradigms, all religions are often equated with one another. This view is supported by pluralistic theology, which challenges the traditional interpretation of Christianity given by traditional theology, firmly rooted in the thought of the scholastic philosopher and theologian, the Dominican friar St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).

Building on earlier reflections, it is clear that Christianity is not magic, an ideology, a result of class struggle, or a reaction to fear or trauma from harsh rulers or natural phenomena. Nor is it a product of evolution destined for inevitable decline. Instead, Christianity reveals humanity's profound relationship with the Triune God, who has disclosed Himself in various ways: through the created world, through and in His creation; in the history of religion and universal history; within human conscience; through human speech; in personal life experiences; and, above all, in the Bible—the inspired Word of God recorded by the authors of the Old and New Testaments—and in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the God-Man.

Christianity, as a religion, is constituted by its distinctive Christian doctrine, which is both original and unique; its worship practices, including the celebration of the Eucharist (the sacrament of Jesus Christ's presence in the world) and other rituals; its lofty moral principles; and, finally, by the institution with a divine-human character—the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Christianity is a specific, original, and unique religion, often described in traditional theology as absolute.

## The originality of Christianity

Christianity is both a monotheistic and a universalist religion. It asserts the existence of the one and only, all-powerful God and offers the prospect of salvation to all people. The core of Christianity is faith in Christ.

The term “Christianity” comes from the title “Christ” (Greek *Christos* and Latin *Christus*), which refers to the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, recognized as the Anointed One and the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of humankind. This is based on Peter's confession of faith: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Mt 16:16). Around the year 43, in Antioch of Syria, Jesus' followers were first called *christiano*i (Acts 11:26). The term likely originated in pagan circles and initially had negative overtones. However, adopted by the followers of the new faith, it began to signify their distinctiveness and identity. (Rusecki 2001a: 484)

The distinctiveness of Christianity from other religions is evidenced by several unique characteristics. Christianity maintains a balance between the transcendent and the immanent (Dajczer 1990a: 22–23). It is not a utopian doctrine detached from the realities of life, nor is it a form of monism that denies either the spiritual or material dimensions of existence. Unlike spiritualism, which views all that has been tainted by matter as alien and hostile, Christianity embraces both the spiritual and material aspects. Christianity is a religion revealed by God (Dajczer 1990a: 24–25). While other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, also claim divine revelation, this does not diminish Christianity's own claims. The revelation presented in the Old Testament by biblical Israel has not been nullified by Christianity. On the contrary, it remains valid, even though its



ultimate fulfillment is found in the revelation of Jesus Christ, which Judaism does not accept.

The distinct feature of Christian revelation is its divine-human dimension. Unlike other religions, including the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths such as Judaism and Islam, Christianity is founded by God Himself. Jesus Christ—the God-Man, as the incarnate Son of God and the second divine person of the Trinity (together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit), was directly involved in establishing Christianity. This religion did not evolve from the religion of biblical Israel according to natural laws. Judaism before Christ neither “conceived” nor “gave birth” to Christianity; rather, its founder is God’s Legate: the Messenger, the Messiah. The grafting of an olive branch into a noble vine does not imply a genetic continuation of biblical Israel’s religion.

Christianity did not originate in an undefined past. It is thoroughly historical, and alongside the *kairos* (the time of God’s special, dynamic action), *chronos* (linear time from past, through the present, to future) plays a key role. In Christianity, there is no cycle of continual returns; time does not come full circle in which what has already been and, at the same time, what is will be again. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, as God, exists beyond time, or above time. Yet, as a man, He inscribed His life within a specific temporal and cultural framework, adhering to the human experience of time. Jesus was born in a particular historical and geographical context. He did not die merely in a symbolic sense but actually on Golgotha, where the Cross united Earth and Heaven. He also truly rose from the dead.

Christianity is oriented towards the *eschaton*, “the new Heaven and new Earth.” Christian eschatology, which refutes theories that speak of an infinite wandering of human souls, or endless reincarnation is another unique aspect the faith. Christianity leads both from here—from the Earth—and from Heaven. The liturgy celebrated on Earth foreshadows the eternal liturgy in Heaven. The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in a Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These are not three “gods” competing with each other and vying for people’s favor. The Trinitarian dogma expresses a great, unfathomable mystery, revealing the essence of Christianity, underlining its communal nature, and most importantly, making the irrefutable argument that the driving force and defining

characteristic of Christianity is God who is love. Belief in the Trinity sets the criterion for identifying a Church or ecclesial community as Christian. Rejecting this fundamental truth disqualifies a community from being recognized as Christian.

Christianity is most clearly represented by Jesus Christ Himself. Through the act of incarnation, by taking on human nature, He became like every human being. He is not a deity like those of the Greek or Roman pantheons or the Hindu deities, some of whom became human and were subject to passions and weaknesses. A hallmark of Christianity is the Eucharist, the sacrament of Jesus Christ's presence in the reality of the world.

The cross of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity as a credible religion. It represents both the foundation and the culmination of the faith. All material and spiritual aspects of Christianity are concentrated in the cross as in a lens. The cross focuses in itself all other Christian symbols, giving them validity and power. Through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ liberated humanity from sin and its consequences, redeeming culture, history, and destiny. His death became the source of life, as the tormented Messiah conquered death through His own death. This redemptive act reached its peak in the glorious resurrection of Jesus, who, as the first to rise, gave to all people, to all mankind of all times, the universal hope of salvation. Even in the face of suffering, pain, despair, and hopelessness, a Christian's life has a paschal dimension, carrying the promise of victory and eternal love in God—the promise of salvation.

Christianity is embodied in churches and ecclesial communities. These are incorporated into the visible community of the faithful through the sacrament of baptism, which signifies immersion into the death and resurrection of Christ. The Church is not an organization that functions according to the rules of secular institutions. As the Mystical Body of Christ—an attribute no other institution in human history or non-Christian religion possesses—the Church embodies both the holiness and the sinfulness of its members. It recognizes that all those called to and gathered within it have been endowed by God, by virtue of the grace of baptism, with an inalienable dignity: prophetic, royal, and priestly. The one, holy, universal, apostolic Church is keenly aware of the immutability and indelibility of these marks, as affirmed by centuries of tradition.



The wealth of Christian thought and the treasury of its Tradition come from the teachings of the holy men of God who laid the foundations of the doctrine: the Church Fathers and the early Christian writers. Over the centuries, they have been joined by a host of saints and blessed ones, including the Doctors of the Church. In the early years of Christianity, the disciples of Jesus Christ, those faithful to His teachings, were called “saints.” This term did not imply people without sin or guilt, but rather a community called to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Saints are humble individuals who understand the truth about themselves and know that their lives find meaning through their faith in Jesus.

Christianity is often described, even by those outside the faith, as a “religion of love.” The daily practice of the commandment to love God and neighbour summarises the moral teachings of Christianity, as enshrined in the Old Testament’s Decalogue and reaffirmed in the New Testament’s Sermon on the Mount. Love of one’s neighbour is not a matter of sentimentalism, irrational emotion, exaltation, or elevated thought. It is a daily, heroic effort to overcome self-centeredness and, at the same time, to reach out to others with generosity, kindness, and compassion.

The imperative to love one’s neighbour highlights a world of human relationships, references, and interactions; a world liberated from blind tribalism. Christianity is not a tribal community in which neighbours are only those who share a tribal affinity. “There is no longer Jew or Gentile; there is no longer slave or free man; there is no longer male or female, for we are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28). These words of St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, clearly point to the universal principle of loving others, including those from different “tribes,” equally created out of the love of God, the one Father of all humanity. A unique imperative present in Christianity is the commandment to love one’s enemies. This commandment does not spring from the naivety of believers in Jesus Christ. Fulfilling this commandment is a testament to one’s freedom from aggression and violence. It affirms the power of goodness and the certainty that it alone is “capable” of overcoming evil. This corresponds to St. Paul’s advice: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

The Bible is the “constitution” of Christianity and sets its foundation. The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, referred to as *Christus scriptus* (“Christ written down”), serve as the norm for Christian life. The Bible is the “food” that provides spiritual strength and vitality. “Eat this scroll [book], and go and speak” (Ez 3:1). This sacred biblical imperative points to the necessity of internalizing the Word of God. The spirit of the Holy Scriptures shapes the thoughts, hearts, and personalities of Christians. Daily reading of the Bible strengthens faith and hope and inspires love. The Bible is foundational not only for a strictly religious-evangelizing mission but also for the cultural-creative mission that Christianity has always carried out. Proclaiming the Holy Scriptures has always been the foremost task of missionaries throughout Christian history. They preached the Gospel and simultaneously founded the Church, promoting the divine within the human.

From its inception, Christianity has had a teaching mission, and functioned as a pedagogical community that educates successive generations of followers of Jesus the Teacher. The theology that speaks of God’s pedagogy in human life underscores the specific features of Christianity as a religion that leads its believers—like a teacher—to the fullness of humanity. The Bible is, therefore, a “handbook of education.” Certain books of the Old Testament, such as the Book of Proverbs, can be directly regarded as pedagogical works.

## Universalism of Christianity

Christianity is a universal religion (Budzik, Kijas 2000). The term “universalism,” combined with the adjective “Christian,” signifies the inclusivity of Christianity as a religion that seeks to embrace all of humanity. The religion of Christ encompasses the entire world, as pointed out in the letters of St. Paul, a Jew by origin who became an apostle to the Gentiles. According to Karol Klauza, the universalism of Christianity is “one of the essential features of this religion ... that reveals its universal nature, global cultural potential, and, in the existential dimension, its connections with all of creation.” This universality manifests as existential universalism, indicating “the existential-soteriological nature of God’s plan,” and cognitive universalism, “which is crucial for understanding God’s revelation, the mystery

of the incarnation, and the paschal events.” Cognitive universalism encompasses “the participation of all creation, including humanity, in the hope of ultimate fulfillment in God” (Klauza 2002: 1288).

Christianity, as a universalist religion, is the religion of the world and all humankind. The Church, as such, is the sacrament of salvation for all people and a sign of their unity. Christianity has never been confined to a single cultural circle; it has evolved into a world religion characterized by temporal (historical) and spatial (geographical-cultural) universality. The universalism of Christianity (Sakowicz 2006: 337–340) is linked to the universal salvific will of God the Father and the universal work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ. The second Divine Person, Jesus Christ, through the paschal mystery (passion, death, and resurrection), redeemed humanity and the human culture in which it exists, fulfilling humanity in both individual and social dimensions. A Christianity that embraces the whole of humanity is inherently opposed to particularism. Its universalism is based on its supernatural nature, as emphasized by the apostolic fathers and apologists (St. Justin Martyr, d. 165; Athenagoras of Athens, d. 190; St. Irenaeus of Lyons, d. 202; St. Clement of Alexandria, d. ca. 215; Tertullian, d. 240; Origen, d. 254; St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258).

The rationale for universalism lies in the mystery of the Triune God: God the Father created and sustains the world, the Son of God redeemed it, and the Holy Spirit, who is present among Christians and mysteriously active in non-Christian religions, fulfils the work of Jesus Christ. Catholicism and Orthodoxy emphasise the universal (cosmic) nature of the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, while Protestantism highlights the individual, inner (subjective) experience of salvation through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Christianity, as a universalist religion, proclaims that all human beings, created in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27) and destined to live with Him as His children, are loved by Him and called to love Him, “Who is Love.” This universalism is expressed in the belief in the Parousia of Jesus Christ and the universal resurrection. It is evidenced in Christian morality, including the defence of human life, dignity, freedom, and justice.

Christian universalism is also reflected in the reinterpretation of the principle “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*,” which means “all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994: 212 [no. 846]). Moreover, the Church acknowledges elements of truth and holiness in other religions, which it does not reject (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions “Nostra Aetate” 1986: 335 [no. 2]). From these premises, it is concluded that all people who discover the truth and fulfil love outside of Christianity belong to the Church (at least in their desire to do so) or are somehow attached to it and can therefore attain salvation, which is the gift of God’s love, given through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross (Sakowicz 2008: 94–102).

Czesław Stanisław Bartnik (d. 2020) believed that “the absolute correlative of a universal religion, with all its salvific, existential and praxeological reality, is God—One, the Only One, Universal, and Inexpressible through specific things” (Bartnik 2002: 99). Addressing the issue of particularism versus universalism in Christianity, Bartnik notes:

For almost two thousand years, Catholic theology espoused a soteriological exclusivism according to which only Catholics could be saved. However, this was a misinterpretation of Mark 16:16. According to the revised teachings of Pius XII and the Second Vatican Council, salvation can also occur in its own way within every religion and through every higher morality. (Bartnik 2002: 101)

This statement points to the shift from Christianity’s particularism towards its universalism. It is important to add that the only saviour of all people is Jesus Christ.

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Religion is a complex, heterogeneous phenomenon that has always been a part of human existence. There has never been a time in the history of humankind without religion. It performs a number of functions, not only strictly sacred ones that connect to transcendence in different ways, but also social, integrative, and aesthetic functions. The existential, historical, and cultural contexts of religion necessitate reflection on it and its expressions—behaviors that externalize belief systems and religious practices. The essence of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is the lifelong relationship between

humans and God (in the Trinity). God, who is Love, inspires love in humans for themselves, for others, and even for their enemies. The essence of Christianity is expressed in its revelatory dimension. Christianity did not come into being as a result of historical opportunism or blind determinism but from the salvific will of God fulfilled by Jesus Christ. It is He, the Son of God, who constitutes the unique characteristics of Christianity as a religion.

Christianity does not deprecate, reject, or negate other religions. Christians believe that Christ came into the world for every human being, for all mankind, and liberated everyone and everything through His saving passion, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is present not only in Christianity but also, in mysterious ways, in non-Christian religions and in the consciences of their followers.

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# Synergistic Nature of Gospel-Inspired Pedagogy

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to show the Gospel as a source of pedagogical thinking and action. The echo of its message is present in different pedagogical currents and concepts considered to be modern and innovative. This indicates the synergistic nature of pedagogy referring to Christianity, the source of which is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the hope which results from that truth that humankind can achieve salvation—a happy life with God for all eternity.

The events described in the Gospels are salvific, the components of which form a network of interconnections. Synergy is revealed in this network, understood as interaction; its result is not only the strengthening of desirable values or the weakening of undesirable phenomena, but the emergence of a new quality. It manifests itself in the fact that pedagogical reflection and educational activities inspired by the idea of the Gospel refer not only to knowledge resulting from natural cognition, but also to that enriched by cognition referring to the Transcendent. At the same time, the use of synergistic effects requires knowledge of the Gospel and the principles of its interpretation.

## Synergy in pedagogy and education

Assuming that education is not about the authoritarian transmission of knowledge and canonical rules of conduct but is instead dependent on a range of social changes, pedagogy emerges as

## KEYWORDS

Gospel, novelty of the Gospel, synergy, pedagogy, pedagogical thinking and action

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a discipline that subjects the experiences of learners and researchers to scientific reflection. In this way, pedagogy, both theoretically and practically, creates a space with almost unlimited potential for the emergence, identification, and activation of actions to reveal synergies (Edwards, Usher 2007). The term is not new, but, at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, much like the term *competence*, it has become a kind of “code word” without a single, fixed definition (Brzostek, Krysztofik 2022). Its ambiguity and multidimensionality are both strengths and sources of definitional challenges. The richness of the phenomenon known as synergy (sometimes called synergetics) is reflected in an increasing number of its typologies (Chadam 2012: 71–72).

Typically, synergy refers to an interaction whose effect, in some respects, is greater than the sum of the individual effects. In this sense, it is sometimes confused with catalytic or moderating interactions. However, the essence of synergy is not the amplification of a quantitative or even qualitative process, but the emergence of an additional quality that did not exist before. In social situations, synergy depends on a large number of variables, which makes it difficult to manage and easy to disrupt or block. Synergy results in a synergistic effect, an additional value arising from the integration of actions. This is particularly valuable in the process of gathering experience.

The analysis and interpretation of experience occur within an established paradigm, the researcher’s perspective resulting from membership in a particular community of thought (Ciechowska, Szymańska 2018: 25–28). One such community of thought is Christianity which has its origin in the person of Jesus Christ, God who became man, whose life, teaching, and especially resurrection bring a new quality to human thinking and acting. This has significant implications for educational processes. Based on this foundation, the pedagogy of the Good News highlights the synergistic potential of educational thought and action.

## Gospel synergy

The term “good news” is synonymous with the word “Gospel” (Gr. *euangelion*). In Greek literature of the pre-Christian and early-Christian era, this word was well known and had three meanings:

(1) a donation offered as a reward to someone who brought good news, (2) an offering made to a deity in thanksgiving for a message received, and (3) a celebrated day of gratitude for good news. In Christianity, the term Gospel has a double meaning: it denotes the doctrine of the salvation of all mankind proclaimed by Christ and His apostles, and it is also the title of the four inspired books containing this doctrine.

In Old Testament times, for successive generations of the chosen people, the Gospel, or good news, was the very announcement of the coming of the Messiah and the story of the work of redemption He was to carry out on earth. This fulfillment is referred to by Christ himself. In the synagogue of Nazareth, after reading the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 62), He explains that He, His activity, His person, and His teachings are the announced good news. When asked directly about His messianic mission and dignity, He affirms that the prophetic announcements are fulfilled in Him. The specific object of Christ's teaching includes the conditions and principles set for all who wish to live in the new Kingdom of God. Everything that the Apostles hear from Jesus, what they see and experience, becomes their shared experience, built on the foundation of the Paschal mystery and transmitted through the mission entrusted to them.

In Polish, the concept of the Gospel is reflected in terms like *dobra nowina* (good news) and *radosna wieść* (joyous tidings)—a message bringing joy about the redemption of all people, announced and prepared by God and accomplished by the Son of God. This redemption involves the liberation of humanity from the power of evil and an invitation to eternal happiness with God (Sbuler 2000: 1110–1111). Therefore, the Gospel is addressed to every human being, regardless of their era, age, social role, or occupation. Its message is an invitation, or even a call, to participate in the mission of salvation by fulfilling one's vocation. Thus, it directly applies to educators, teachers, mentors, and anyone who cares about the happiness of others and sees the path to achieving this through teaching and learning. This is a typical path of Gospel thinking and action. As Adam Szromek points out, it is not so much about efficient as about effective achievement of goals (Szromek 2017). The good news contained in the Gospel arises from the interplay of natural and transcendent factors that shape human life. These factors not only imbue life with a new quality, which testifies to their synergistic nature, but they are themselves a new quality.

These factors include the individuals connected to a common source and purpose, the content of the good news, the methods of gathering experience, and the execution of the mission. The internal and external relationships among these elements create spaces where synergies are revealed.

The synergistic nature of relationships between people stems from embracing a personalistic concept of humanity and belief in a personal God. The personalistic nature of the Gospel, both horizontally and vertically, heightens one's awareness of the synergistic potential in its sources, purpose, content, and methods of gathering experience and fulfilling the mission. The relationships among these categories are built on the pedeutological triad known as the "Triple Teacher" (Inner Teacher—SELF, Outer Teacher—OTHERS, Transcendent Teacher—GOD). A specific feature of this triad is that the Transcendent Teacher is revealed in the intentions and actions of both the Inner Teacher and the Outer Teacher (Marek, Walulik 2000: 77–80; Paślawska-Smęder 2022). This "triple relationality" takes on fuller meaning in relation to God manifested in the person of Jesus Christ, as it sensitizes us to the dimension of the sacred, which, in the Christian understanding, also permeates what is commonly regarded as the profane. The coordination, interdependence, and interaction between the sacred and the profane result in the emergence of a new quality of understanding oneself and the surrounding world.

The content of the good news is the joyous tidings of the Messiah and the redemption that He accomplished, known as the Paschal mystery of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is new and unique because it is proclaimed with a power that introduces the complete otherness of God's final revelation. It consists of three fundamental themes: (1) the announcement of the salvation of humanity, (2) the entry of the Kingdom of God into earthly history, and (3) the beginning of the fulfillment of the Messianic-eschatological era. These are not three separate themes but one unified good news of the salvation of humankind and the world, with synergistic links between them.

The synergistic nature of the purpose is expressed by perceiving the ultimate center of reference (ultimate concerns<sup>1</sup>) from

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1 In his introduction to the Polish edition of Margaret S. Archer's book *Culture and Agency*, Krzysztof Wielecki explains that *sprawy ostateczne* are sometimes

a transcendental perspective. This means that a person experiencing an emotional interest in something important in the present relates it to the eternal and infinite. In the search for the meaning of life and the source of the world's being, one finds it in the personal God. The synergy revealed as a new quality suggests that the spiritual dimension should be considered in understanding humanity, defining life's purpose from a transcendental perspective, building knowledge through both natural and religious cognition, and recognizing God as an axiological reference point. Based on this foundation, concepts of Christian-inspired education are developed, such as the pedagogy of the Good News (Marek, Walulik 2020), the pedagogy of witness (Marek, Walulik 2019), and the pedagogy of accompaniment (Marek 2017; Marek, Walulik 2022).

### Pedagogical synergy in the Gospel

From a pedagogical perspective, the synergistic nature of the Gospel is primarily expressed in the recognition of the dignity of a person as the foundation of all educational actions. A person possesses dignity with essential characteristics such as intransferability, inalienability, irreversibility, and irreducibility (Adamski 2005). This means that a person's dignity is independent of age, gender, origin, or social and historical context. It holds an absolute status and is intrinsic to the essence of God, with human beings participating in and sharing this dignity. This understanding of human dignity also underscores the equality of all human beings (Granat 1985; Mariański 2019) and man's unique place among other entities: As John Paul II noted, "Man is the only creature on earth whom God willed for himself" (John Paul II 1979, No 13).

This view of human dignity is rooted in the Gospel, which represents the Good News of God standing with humanity. Therefore, the pedagogy of the Good News places a strong emphasis on defending human rights and dignity. By referring to the dignity of the human

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translated as "ultimate concerns," though his consultations with Prof. Archer led him to believe that it would be better to refer to them as "essential concerns" (Archer 2019: 31). The use of the term "essential" instead of "ultimate" also corresponds better to Paul Tillich's understanding of faith as an ultimate concern (see Bogdalczyk 2012: 83).

person grounded in the divine, it does not propose a new ideal of humanity but offers a fresh perspective on understanding the totality of phenomena and conditions related to the essence and functioning of human beings. This approach helps safeguard pedagogy and education from the risk of ideologization (Nowak 1996). Dignity is a value to which every person is entitled, regardless of any internal or external conditions. In ancient Greek culture, dignity was already recognized as a measure of human excellence (Mariański 2017). It is one of the fundamental personal characteristics of a person and is embedded in their ontic structure (Kiereś 2009), shaped by reason, freedom, spirituality, and conscience (Chałas 2006).

Human rationality manifests in the capacity for intellectual knowledge of the truth about oneself, the world, and God. Freedom grows out of this knowledge and is expressed in the ability and possibility to choose values. Spirituality is shaped by consciousness (cognition), emotionality (feelings), and values (including religious values), with their internalized hierarchy. It reveals itself in the experiences of different spheres of life, especially within morality, worldview, creativity, and relationships with others. The conscience is the factor that creates morality, which enables the understanding of the quality of one's own behavior. This demonstrates the need to perceive the person as a dynamic subject, which is not opposed to the inalienability of dignity but shows new perspectives for understanding the importance of dignity for personal development (Kunowski 1997).

The novelty of the Gospel, concerning the components that build up the dignity of the person, is expressed in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, through His words and actions, testifies to God's concern for humanity. By His attitude, Christ gives new meaning to the qualities that express human dignity. Christ's attitude demonstrates that reason, freedom, spirituality, and conscience intermingle, creating a space for the discovery of dignity. Jesus refers to both the natural and supernatural dimensions of the human being when teaching about God. Such teaching is not indoctrination but a witness, implying conformity between thought, speech, and action. It also presupposes that it is up to each individual to accept, internalize and live this witness or to reject it.

The novelty of the Gospel is also expressed in perceiving the purpose of life from a transcendent perspective; that is, it eludes ordinary

human experience and goes beyond the reach of the five basic senses. It directs humanity towards a reality that exists beyond itself, making it possible to explain existential problems that reason alone cannot solve (Marek 2022). The perception of the purpose of life from a transcendent perspective is significantly influenced by one's image of God. This is not a question of human conceptions of this reality but about God's actions as revealed in the Bible and experienced by humanity. This understanding is made possible by the spiritual aspect of humans. Spirituality is expressed through a person's preferred attitudes, habits, and values, which are characterized by a reflective attitude towards everyday life, a respectful attitude towards the world, belief in immortality, and hope of communing with God for all eternity (Marek 2017).

The essence of Christianity is to be in a relationship with God that is limited neither by time nor space because it has its origin in the resurrection of Christ. This event is unparalleled and incomparable within natural experience, cognition, and spirituality. It defies both reification and spiritualization. The experience of the resurrection is born out of a transformative encounter that gives relationships a new quality. It signifies the risen Jesus illuminating the darkness of sin and evil, drawing people into the realm of eternity. Recognizing and acknowledging the risen Jesus as the living One alters the existential situation of human beings. Faith is the condition for this transformation—a fundamental orientation toward the concerns of Christianity that entails openness to God. Faith in God is a gift that requires a human response. It is grounded not only in feelings, but primarily in reason and the decisions of the will. Without engaging reason and the will, faith would succumb to adversity and difficulties. Simultaneously, faith ventures into a reality that is inaccessible to reason (Marek, Walulik 2020: 51–54). This points to another novelty of the Gospel: its openness to the potentials of natural and religious understanding. These avenues generate a novel approach to pedagogical thought and action, exemplified by Jesus' proclamation about Himself: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). This testifies to the relational dimension of education and validates the concept of the "Triple Teacher" discussed earlier.

Human dignity also unveils the link between moral values—understood as particular qualities and behaviors of the human person,

and metaphysical qualities that transcend full definition by reason, yet infuse life with deeper significance. These qualities reveal themselves in intricate interpersonal dynamics and enhance our comprehension of the world around us. They are particularly evident in art (Ingarden 1960).

By virtue of his inherent dignity, man functions within culture yet also transcends it. Human nature “is the measure of culture, and it is thanks to it that man does not become a prisoner of any of his cultures, but strengthens his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being” (John Paul II 1993, no. 53). Thus, the new quality of the Gospel is expressed in the recognition of God as the axiological point of reference. At the same time, the Gospel is not a mere set of commandments, precepts, or moral rules. Instead, it centers on the person of God, who enters into a relationship with man, acts on his behalf, and is motivated by love and mercy. This love surpasses the notion of loving one’s neighbor “as oneself”; it is a love so profound that it involves giving one’s life for one’s neighbor, that is, making daily sacrifices through free and conscious decisions. It entails respecting every person and building a sense of personal dignity.<sup>2</sup>

When Jesus said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34), He introduced a new commandment that centered on love: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love (John 15:9–10). This teaching embodies the new justice and proclaims the ethics of the kingdom of God. The new righteousness does not emphasize what is new (in a revolutionary sense but breaks from previously accepted customs, stemming from a “new” interpretation of the “old” Law.<sup>3</sup> Christ profoundly reveals its essence, giving the commandments their proper meaning, greater clarity, ultimate form, and fullness (Marek, Walulik 2021).

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2 This distinction is evidenced, for example, by Christ’ many confrontations with the Pharisees, who do not understand His attitude towards tax collectors—viewed as supporters of the enemy and thus as sinners (e.g., Matt. 9:9–13)—or by His attitude towards women, which differs from that of the Jews (e.g., Luke 8:1–3).

3 The term refers to the rules that applied in the Old Testament.

The new righteousness should be understood as an eschatological work: it is given to people as a new revelation and inscribed within them. It is characterized by activity, freedom, and gratuitousness. At the same time, freedom of choice presupposes knowledge of the Gospel, i.e., attaining the ability to distinguish the “new” from the “old.” This righteousness has a personal character: Christians are to live by faith in Jesus, with discipleship as the essence of their lives. The criterion for Christian morality is not solely the words of Jesus but His entire life. “In this way, thinking about the human being has left the shallow waters of psychologism and entered the depths of agathology” (Tischner 1990: 226). Emphasizing the importance of virtues in creating synergistic spaces stems from the conviction that every action of a human as a rational being begins with a decision made by the spiritual faculties of intellect and will (Horowski 2020).

## Conclusion

The synergistic nature of Gospel-inspired pedagogy (i.e. bringing a new quality) is evident in how the person and teachings of Jesus Christ form the foundation of pedagogical thought and practice. This influence is present, whether consciously or unconsciously, among researchers. It is unjustifiable to pit traditional pedagogy against so-called modern pedagogy. The real difference lies in their ultimate concerns and the meanings they assign to their values. The most cherished values in modern pedagogical currents—such as humanism, subjectivity, freedom, emancipation, creativity, and flexibility—originate from the Gospel and have a deeper understanding than what is typically discussed in mainstream pedagogical discourse. From the perspective of the Gospel, thinking in terms of human sciences is enriched by personalism, which makes a clear distinction between a person and personality, recognizing the person as the highest category of being. A person is a dynamic being, capable of discovering the truth about themselves, and thus open to the world, others, and God. For pedagogy, this means that the person is both the subject who educates and who is educated.

In the evangelical view, being a subject comes from the inherent dignity of the person. Pedagogically, this implies that recognizing a person’s dignity as an inalienable and irreducible value sets

the framework for understanding the goal of education, which is human happiness beyond the material realm—happiness understood in a transcendent, spiritual dimension, as life with God throughout eternity. Achieving this goal involves making free decisions based on love, adopting certain attitudes, and displaying specific behaviors. The Gospel defines freedom as liberation from the most enslaving oppression, which is evil: individual and social sin. Therefore, the Gospel does not impose ready-made solutions but encourages creativity and the discovery of personal potential. It enables us to bear witness and find our place in the unpredictability of everyday life.

Discovering and initiating Gospel synergies requires understanding the Gospel's content and principles of interpretation, and appealing not only to natural cognition but also to supernatural, religious cognition. This approach helps avoid the errors of historicizing, moralizing and psychologizing, and prevents overinterpreting one's own experience. Only then will Gospel synergies truly enhance pedagogical thinking and action.

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# Educational Value of Accompaniment Pedagogy

## ABSTRACT

Pedagogical work supports the development of the pupil by helping to achieve well-being, harmony in relationships with oneself and the environment, and, consequently, one's goals. However, this vision of human development in pedagogical practice may take various forms. The article presents the vision of pedagogical support which results from the perception of humankind and personal development in terms of accompaniment pedagogy, also known as Jesuit pedagogy. The subject of reflection is the spirituality that arises from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Its uniqueness lies in its theocentric and Christocentric perception of the world and humankind. In this spirituality, two principles deserve special attention—*magis* and *cura personalis*—which, both in practice and in scientific reflection, seem to lead to a synergistic effect. Referring to the message contained in these principles, the article presents the possibilities of using accompaniment pedagogy in everyday educational interactions.

KEYWORDS:  
spirituality, education,  
pedagogy of  
accompaniment,  
synergy in education,  
personalism

## Introduction

If not every pedagogical trend, then the vast majority of them, presupposes supporting individuals in achieving their life goals. The success of these goals relies on a number of factors, including the harmonious interaction of those involved in educational

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and upbringing processes, which can produce a synergistic effect. In this article, I intend to present a vision of such interaction in terms of accompaniment pedagogy, also known as Jesuit pedagogy, inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. This booklet offers several educational principles: identifying goals, fostering independence and responsibility, systematically guiding the educational process while adapting to individual needs, actively seeking truth and personalizing it for one's development, and caring for the well-being of others. The Jesuits adapted these principles for educational purposes and integrated them into their school system (Marek 2017: 35).

### Sources of accompaniment pedagogy

Accompaniment pedagogy falls within the tradition of Christian pedagogy, characterized by theocentric and Christocentric views of the world and humanity. Its uniqueness results from the spirituality of the *Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). This classic work of Christian spirituality should not be regarded as a deliberate, complete and exhaustive treatise on the inner life and the pursuit of perfection, but rather a practical guide to help retreat participants overcome personal weaknesses and organize their lives according to God's will. Therefore, its contents are not theoretical or abstract reflections, but practical suggestions on how to arrange one's life in complete submission to the will of God. It includes guidance on meditation, examination of conscience, and other practices aimed at developing one's inner life during retreats.

The term "spirituality" itself is considered simple yet indefinable. It conveys a community of "the meaning of value and sense that governs certain structures. These can be individual meanings of life, situational meanings, but also corporate, national, and religious meanings" (Ablewicz 2007: 77). The term first appeared in literature in the fifth century with a religious (Christian) meaning originally. Over the centuries, it has acquired various dimensions, but it consistently expresses humanity's aspiration to unite with God and establish a relationship with Him. In essence, "spirituality" describes the spiritual experiences of believers, born from the personal experience of faith and the desire to live with God in happiness and love (Marek 2017: 96–97). This effort involves understanding oneself and

one's life in the light of the Gospel, as communicated within the community of the Church. Christian spirituality, understood in this way, manifests in many forms of spirituality among different religious groups and individual believers (Chmielewski 2002: 230).

St. Ignatius of Loyola stands out among the notable figures who emphasized Christian spirituality. In his view, spirituality is theocentric since it views God not as an abstract or philosophical concept, nor as someone distant and unattainable, but as unconditionally loving Love. This love is discovered primarily in Christ, who is the mediator between God and humanity and humanity's Savior (Misiurek 2002: 348–349; Fleming 2013). Ignatius viewed Christ as “the God who reveals the depths of the Trinity, leaning over humanity in an ongoing act of love. It is Love that creates, sustains, saves, and attracts. According to St. Ignatius, it is only in Jesus Christ that the true God can be encountered, and this is a total work of grace” (Wójtowicz 2010: 63–64).

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For Ignatius of Loyola, God is the absolute value and the source and goal of all good. To Him, all other values should be subordinated, including humanity, whose overriding duty is to care for the greater glory of God and to find Him in all things (Łacny 2010: 153). This attitude involves growing in service to God and bringing glory to Him. In these contexts, the terms characteristic of Ignatian spirituality emerged: service “for the greater glory of God” (*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*) (Piechnik 2003: 8) and “helping souls.” These concepts embody the readiness to help people honor God, thus achieving the fullness of life called “immortality” (life with God without end).

Such spirituality presupposes human desire and the effort to seek and choose what is most helpful in serving God, contributing to His greater glory and facilitating human development. The adjective “greater” expresses the human desire to cross boundaries and set new goals that support personal growth. It is not about comparing one's actions with others' achievements or measuring one's own progress in inner life by some absolute yardstick. Instead, it is about “the surest

possible development of the individual at each stage of life, with the readiness to continue developing throughout life and the motivation to use one's gifts for the good of others" (*Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej* 2006: 27).

To emphasize the importance of concern for the glory of God, St. Ignatius used the Latin adverb *magis* (more, better). In this context, it means to grow stronger, love more, go further, in order that, apart from God, you may desire and choose only what leads you to the goal for which you were created (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2013). Following the principle of *magis* helps one understand that one can always take the next step as compared to where one currently is. Moreover, the effort put into such development glorifies God. This "desire, seeking, and choosing what best serves God for the greater glory of the Divine Majesty and the good of souls animates the entire spiritual exercises, their soul and immanent directive, a constant and unchanging orientation" (Królikowski 2022: 167). St. Ignatius emphasized that love, being unlimited in principle, always wants more and always strives for the highest peaks. Thus, it becomes a guiding life principle, showing that one should always choose and desire solutions that most fully contribute to their ultimate goal.

Deciding to be guided by the principle of *magis* is possible through spiritual discernment, which enables a person to recognize and choose the good around them (Polish Provinces of the Society of Jesus 2017: 101). In Jesuit spirituality, discernment is considered the art of inner, spiritual discovery, revealing the direction in which the desires of the human heart lead. Without the capacity for discernment, people succumb to impulses that prevent them from making responsible decisions that strengthen their harmonious relationship with God and the world. However, discernment alone is not a recipe for a successful life. Instead, it fosters an attitude that is open and free from disordered attachments (Steczek 2007: 80–81). Skillful discernment helps separate what causes confusion from what is valuable, enabling a person to make free decisions (Jurado 2002: 21–22). In St. Ignatius of Loyola's understanding, discernment is meant to provide the impulse to make the right choices in both external and internal life.

In the spirituality promoted by St. Ignatius of Loyola, discernment helps individuals seek "the greater glory of God" and bring

“greater help to souls.” This help primarily refers to the development of the inner life by awakening the conviction to seek and find God in all things and to honor Him above all other values in daily life (Loyola 2013; Lambert 2001: 15). In this activity, one should engage not only their feelings but also their reason and will (Lambert 2001: 22). This requires an inner effort to work on oneself, going “beyond a purely egoistic preoccupation with oneself.” [St. Ignatius—note Z.M.] emphasized that in making this effort, one “will progress in all spiritual matters to the extent that they free themselves from self-love, their own desires, and their own interests.” A step out of oneself is a step towards others (Lambert 2001: 15). This involves growing in religious faith and acquiring the ability to know and accept God and His love (*Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej* 2006: 33; Jalics 2017). This attitude should stem from respect for human dignity. The spirituality outlined by St. Ignatius consists in accepting values and attitudes that grow out of the Gospel, nurturing Christian customs, and ensuring a person’s integral development (Fleming 2013).

Another aspect of Ignatian spirituality points to the importance of cherishing established traditions related to permanence, which endures unlike fleeting trends because it stems from a history, culture, or religion that the person recalls and accepts, helping them find their own identity (Nikitorowicz 2007). Moreover, understanding and embracing these traditions provide motives to justify specific behaviors. For St. Ignatius Loyola, tradition sensitizes individuals to the need to engage in the process of returning the created world to God through personal service to His Divine Majesty. The essence of this service is to do the will of God. The motives for undertaking this service are found in the awareness of one’s own sinfulness and inclination to evil, as well as in the love of God who, through Jesus Christ, appeals to humanity to convert and live with God. This initiative requires constant spiritual (inner) effort, enabling one to overcome personal weaknesses and organize their life according to divine law, thus acquiring the virtue of “self-management” (Kolvenbach 2003: 131–134; Michalski 2004: 15). It fosters an inner conviction that life is lived for God, who is the highest good and happiness (*Wprowadzenie do ćwiczeń duchownych* 1968: 8–9, 79; Poznański 2010: 45).

St. Ignatius of Loyola understood that a person’s inner development may be disturbed and distorted by the action of an evil spirit,

a challenge he faced in his own life and observed in those undergoing the spiritual exercises. In order to prevent this danger, retreatants should have a companion, commonly referred to as an exercise director. The director's role is to accompany and support the retreat participant, helping them cooperate with their Creator and Lord in their choices (St. Ignatius of Loyola 2013). The spiritual director aids the retreatant in defending against all kinds of illusions by explaining certain principles of the interior life and exposing falsehoods. This, in turn, requires listening to the retreatant's shared spiritual experiences to understand and, if necessary, explain their inner states (joy, sadness, loneliness). The spiritual director should also raise awareness of any difficulties or obstacles to the retreatant's inner development. However, the director must never suggest or encourage one to make a particular choice; the choice belongs solely to the retreatant (Marek 2017: 40–41).

### Tenets of the pedagogy of accompaniment

The features of Ignatian spirituality described above were applied in the educational system developed by the Jesuits from the 16th century onwards. These principles were put forward in the document *Ratio atque institutio studiorum SJ* (abbreviated as *Ratio studiorum*), published in 1599 (Piechnik 2003; Inglot 2007: 89). The significance of this document for Jesuit education is evidenced by its approval by the order's highest legislative body, the General Congregation, in 1616. Rather than being a theoretical treatise, the document was prepared in the form of practical rules for the Jesuits to achieve specific spiritual, pedagogical, and didactic objectives. It describes detailed norms for the programs and teaching methods used in Jesuit educational centres, serving as a handbook to assist teachers and pedagogues in the day-to-day management of schools and teaching (Inglot 2007: 90). This system remained in force in Jesuit education until the order was abolished by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.

When Pope Pius VII resumed the Order's activities in 1814, the Jesuits renewed their efforts to reconstruct their educational system, which is based on Ignatian spirituality. According to the Gospel, this system aims to educate students to achieve the good acquired through the integral development of humanity in the biological, intellectual,

spiritual, and moral dimensions. The harmonious development of humanity ensures respect for the proper role of each participant in the educational processes. This process primarily involves understanding that the human being is not an absolute value. Therefore, in education, which is understood as a mutual interaction between the educator and the educated, neither party can fully and sufficiently achieve life's perfection. Its only giver is the personal God in whom one trusts.

The fruits of long discussions and work are two documents: *Charakterystyczne cechy jezuickiego wychowania* [Characteristics of Jesuit Education] and *Pedagogia ignacjańska. Podejście praktyczne* [Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach] (Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej 2006). The educational model presented in these documents is based on spirituality growing out of the *Spiritual Exercises* and on the philosophical and theological current developed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries called Christian personalism (Marek 2017: 136). According to its assumptions, the personal God is an absolute value for humanity. It is also to Him that all other values are subordinated, including humanity, which is described as a “derivative being,” i.e., dependent on God (Zdybicka 2006: 282–289).

In order to meet the challenges of Christian personalism, education must include not only empirical and intellectual knowledge, known as natural cognition, but also supernatural (religious) cognition. Supernatural cognition complements the knowledge gained from everyday experience, empiricism and intellectual reflection with insights that natural cognition cannot access. This type of knowledge, derived from divine revelation, does not provide irrefutable empirical evidence. On the contrary, it requires thoughtful reflection and faith based on the authority of God communicating specific truths (Marek 2017). In the Christian understanding, these two forms of knowledge are complementary and never mutually exclusive, as each accesses different aspects of truth. The ability to use both forms of knowledge encourages further search for truth (Marek 2007: 103–104; Mol, Paślawska-Smęder 2022: 79).

In Jesuit schools, educational processes are inspired by Ignatian spirituality and the principles of Christian personalism, which posits a theocentric perception of the world and humanity. Consequently, these processes are influenced by the relationships among the

student, the teacher, and God. The relationships that the educator and the student establish with God are particularly important. This is based on the concept of the image of God, which refers not to visual representations but to the experience of His presence and action in human life. Contemporary individuals encounter such experiences in the pages of the Bible, discovering that God is always supportive and actively involved in their pursuit of the highest good, which Christians call eternal life or immortality.

In the Jesuit educational model, the educator-teacher plays a significant role. It is not enough for the teacher to merely transmit knowledge in a proper way. The teacher must also accompany the student in their educational and maturation processes. The role of the director of the spiritual exercises serves as a model for this role. Like a spiritual director, the teacher should act as a companion in the educational processes, assisting the student in their endeavors. Following the example of the spiritual director, the teacher provides necessary explanations of complex matters related not only to academic knowledge but also to aspects of human life, always respecting the student's freedom and choices. The teacher can neither act as an arbitrator of the student's life decisions nor do anything on their behalf. This approach helps the student realize that they shape their future and humanity. Following Saint Ignatius of Loyola's instructions to the directors of the exercises, the teacher can add, explain, and indicate potential difficulties in the ongoing educational process. Unlike the somewhat conservative role of the spiritual director, Ignatian pedagogy promotes all forms of student activity, incorporating not only intellectual faculties but also emotional and volitional capacities into these processes.

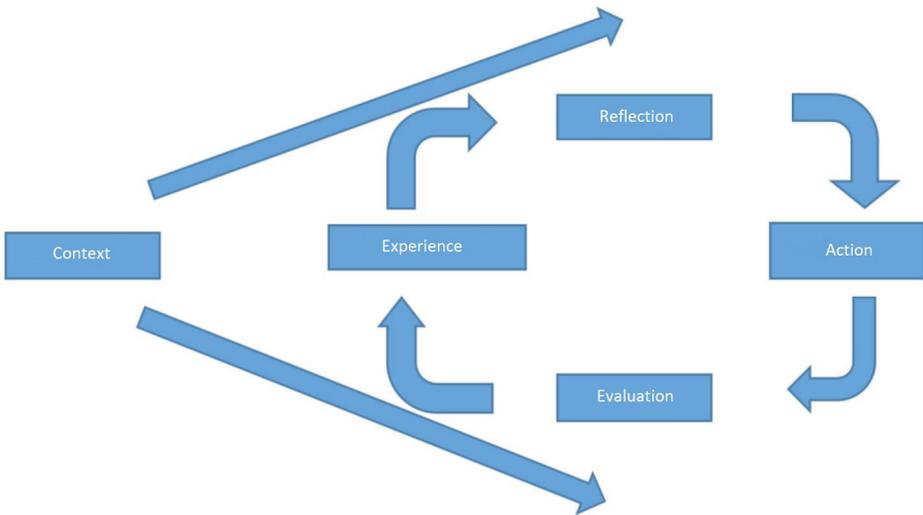
The effectiveness of educational interactions hinges on the relationships established among educational entities. Therefore, in accompaniment pedagogy, trust, along with witnessing, constitutes essential elements of educational processes in their broadest sense. It should be remembered that building trust involves more than presenting rigorous intellectual arguments; it entails demonstrating the right attitudes towards life. Therefore, teachers should be aware that "witnessing is something different than teaching. While teaching emphasizes argumentation, successive steps towards effectiveness, mental operations, and drawing appropriate conclusions from

actions, witnessing highlights interests, experiences, involvement, and outward expression. In this sense, the witness does not so much discover as transmit existing values to those they testify to” (Marek, Walulik 2019: 244). Both trust and witnessing help teachers understand each other’s perspectives, life circumstances and arguments concerning the issues they deal with (Marek 2017: 57–58, 243).

Jesuits express their concern for individual well-being through the Latin term *cura personalis* (Casalini 2019: 123–134). This term underscores the imperative of supporting individuals in their comprehensive development. The essence of such assistance encompasses initiatives aimed at fostering holistic personal growth and maturity in both natural and religious dimensions. Essentially, it involves cultivating a mindset that encourages taking risks beyond one’s self-interests to be receptive to others’ needs (Marek 2017: 205–206). This approach affirms that the educational model growing out of Ignatian spirituality is fundamentally concerned with human formation. It prioritizes the holistic (natural and religious) development, growth, and maturation of individuals on their journey to acquire and refine both theoretical and practical knowledge essential for serving the greater good.

## Principles of accompaniment pedagogy

Rooted in Ignatian spirituality and Christian personalism, the principles of Jesuit pedagogy are detailed in the documents *Characteristics of Jesuit Education* and *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Podstawy edukacji ignacjańskiej 2006). The main approach is illustrated in the diagram below:



Source: own elaboration.

The first key element of the Jesuit model of education is recognizing the context of the student’s life. This involves teachers being aware of the socio-cultural factors and conditions that significantly influence the student’s functioning in society. Understanding these factors helps teachers adapt their instructional strategies to meet the real needs and expectations of the student. The goal is recognizing the subjectivity of the young person and acknowledging their individuality. This perspective positions the teacher as a companion rather than an authority imposing a particular way of thinking and acting.

The next steps in this educational model involve the student recalling and verbalizing their experiences related to the issue at hand and reflecting on its significance for their life (Marek 2017: 44–47). In the diagram, this step is termed “reflection.” It involves discerning the meaning and causes of the current situation. To engage in such reflection (discernment), the student must utilize their intellectual, emotional, and volitional resources in order to understand better the value and significance of their daily experiences. This process helps the student categorize the influences of their environment and culture as “good” or “bad” (Marek, Walulik 2020: 182). Over time, the student develops the ability to interpret reality independently and responsibly, taking ownership of their decisions (Gallagher 2008: 314). A distinctive feature of this pedagogy is that it not only

encourages broad reflection on recalled experiences but also inspires and empowers the student to make sometimes difficult decisions. This phase is termed “action.” It aims not only to prompt a moral assessment of the situation but also to lead to specific actions based on the prior discernment.

The final link in the Ignatian education model is to help the student acquire the ability to critically evaluate what they have achieved so far in terms of their own development and maturity. This phase, called “evaluation,” aims to assist students in discovering and imitating models for establishing interpersonal relationships, and through cultivating these relationships to become men and women for others—according to the principles of *magis* and *cura personalis*, which are central to Jesuit spirituality. At this stage, as in earlier ones, the teacher has the obligation to accompany the student in order to provide greater objectivity in evaluating their own life history (Marek, Walulik 2020: 162) and helping them avoid excessive personal involvement.

### Accompaniment pedagogy supports the effect of synergy

The activities of an educated person in the educational field are influenced by the values they accept, which, in the Ignatian spirit, should relate to three entities: God as the absolute value, the teacher, and every other person as God’s creature. This approach can result in a new quality of life by transcending various dimensions of existence (Mol, Paśławska-Smęder 2022: 79), enriching the understanding of well-being, and broadening the recognized life meanings. In this process, as in previous ones, the teacher—the person accompanying the student—has an important role to play. The teacher should to inspire the student to independently reflect on experiences, subjects, ideas, and their hidden meanings, using available forms of cognition. These strategies aim to induce a synergistic effect (Brzostek, Krysztofik 2022: 313). However, this is not a question of amplifying quantitative or qualitative processes but of the emergence of a new, additional quality in the person’s life that was not there before (Walulik 2011: 141), providing them with new “capital” that will enable them to reinterpret their own experiences. This approach strives for a fuller understanding of oneself and one’s existence, and for offering

new motives to act and adopt certain attitudes (Milerski 2022: 136). Such opportunities are provided by pedagogical initiatives based on Christian theocentrism and the ability to use religious cognition (Marek 2017: 198). It should be borne in mind that the level and intensity of interpersonal relationships, as well as the relationship with God, determine the synergistic effect (Marek 2017: 90).

In light of the principles of accompaniment pedagogy, it can be assumed that inducing a synergistic effect helps a person reconstruct their thinking and actions according to newly learned realities. This seems to be confirmed by ongoing research (Paśławska-Smęder 2021), which shows that creative living and education—shaped by various contexts: external (environments that institutionally or occasionally engage in educational activities, whether planned or unplanned), internal (the individual’s ability to recognize intuitions through their conscience), and transcendent (respect for the existence of God)—play an important role in inducing the synergistic effect. Respect for God enables transcending knowledge and life experiences, which brings new light to understanding experiences in relation to life decisions. Including these contexts of human life in educational practice allows for a fuller understanding of one’s own life story, as well as that of others. This, in turn, gives life a new quality (Paśławska-Smęder 2021).

The synergistic effect can also occur without the transcendental dimension. Monika Tryburska’s research on vocational counselling in Polish schools shows this regularity. She found that external and internal contexts alone also produce a synergistic effect. By evoking these contexts, individuals (students) can better identify their strengths and weaknesses necessary for specific professions. Tryburska also noted that the intensity of reflection on experiences significantly influences career choices, as it amplifies the motivation to pursue a profession and the ambition to create good (Tryburska 2022).

## Conclusion

Based on the above considerations, it is evident that a key feature of accompaniment pedagogy is the effort to elicit as much activity as possible from the student. This model of education presupposes a meeting of individuals oriented towards a clearly defined goal,

which encompasses both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human life. It assumes that the student is not left alone to rely solely on intuition but that the teacher remains close, overseeing the entire process. The teacher's role is reduced to that of a witness who seeks the truth, explaining it rather than imposing it. Significantly, this search for truth includes religious knowledge, which allows a person to see problems from God's perspective. This approach helps individuals achieve a greater maturity and acceptance through a new understanding of life based on harmony with themselves, their environment, and God.

When applied to educational practice, accompaniment pedagogy, like any pedagogical influence, does not automatically produce the effect of synergy. However, by fostering the student's optimal activity during educational processes and awakening a sense of closeness and friendliness among all participants (teacher and God), there is a high probability of achieving a synergistic effect. This suggests that accompaniment pedagogy can inspire teachers to interact with the subjects of education. For those with a religious worldview, this cooperation will involve respecting God and the resulting consequences. For those with a different worldview, it will refer to humanism. In both cases, the primary goal of the educational process and the achievement of a synergistic effect is to enable the student to recognize and strive for the good they desire.

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# The Place of Religion in the Lives of Gifted People

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to show the place of religion in the lives of gifted people. The subject of the related research was gifted people's understanding of religion. It was conducted using qualitative methods in the interpretive paradigm. Proxemic analysis was performed on the research results, leading to the conclusion that religion is important in the lives of gifted people. It is an indispensable element on their path to personal maturity and comprehensive development. Faith in God allows them to discover the meaning of life and helps them to define their own goals and successfully achieve them. Thanks to religion, the respondents discovered a sense of community and gained the support of other believers—friends from the parish and family members. Faith strengthens them in their sense of security and the experience of individual fulfillment and it protects from repeating destructive behavioral patterns. Having general and specific abilities and achieving academic success did not prevent the respondents from living their faith. Among the pedagogical implications, it is worth emphasizing the need for an integral perception of a person who also needs faith in God for their holistic development. In this perspective, educators, teachers, and parents who share their faith in God can play an important role for the younger generations and can accompany them in their faith and everyday life.

## KEYWORDS

gifted individuals,  
talents, religion, faith,  
spirituality

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## Introduction and definitions related to the research topic

This article analyzes the role of religion in the lives of gifted individuals, examining how they approach and understand religion and the personal significance they attach to it. It seeks to understand whether gifted individuals engage in prayer, talk to God, ponder existential questions, and develop their faith differently compared to those who do not achieve high academic results. This issue has not been studied in depth and represents a notable research gap, with no similar studies available in Polish literature. The author has been conducting qualitative research in this area for several years, though incorporating quantitative research could provide a more complete picture. For this article, key concepts such as religion, faith, spirituality, and giftedness will be defined in more detail. Clarifying these terms is essential, as their meanings can vary depending on the research context and researcher's perspective.

In the experience of religion, the focus is often on religious practices, belief in a personal God, and participation in church structures (Marianński, 2010: 207). Religion helps individuals satisfy their innate need to find the meaning of life, while also confronting the limitations of their existence, thus prompting them to seek God. Christian religion, in particular, manifests through personal faith and has both individual and communal dimensions (Walulik, 2011: 37). This article adopts Zbigniew Marek's definition of religion, which seems most fitting for this research. Marek argues that religion supports individuals in undertaking and fulfilling life projects, resolving conflicts, and navigating boundary situations through the authority of God. It serves educational and formative functions by helping students accept and absolutize moral values, integrate life experiences, hierarchize values, find life's meaning, gain a sense of security in the face of human transience, and determine a life path (Marek 2015: 18).

Regarding the concept of faith, this article follows Anna Walulik's definition, which seems to fit best with the author's study. Walulik believes that every person has some form of faith, even if it is limited to concerns about ultimate and eternal matters. While faith and religion are often used interchangeably in everyday language, they differ in meaning. In Catholic theology, faith is understood as a personal commitment to God and acceptance of revealed truths. This form of

faith matures with individuals over time as they gain various experiences (Walulik 2012b: 92). Another concept is spirituality, which differs from religion. Spirituality does not require religious contexts or a relationship with God. Instead, it refers to the human capacity for self-transcendence inherent in human nature (Mielicka-Pawłowska 2021: 25). For this article, we adopt David L. Fleming's definition of spirituality, which describes it as a set of attitudes, habits, and values that shape a person's conduct and promote a vision of life that is characterized by a reflective attitude towards everyday life (Fleming 2013: 5). This definition is particularly useful for analyzing how gifted individuals understand spiritual life.

The next concept to define is the "gifted person." Typically, this refers to someone who possesses both general and specific abilities and achieves high academic results, such as excelling in competitions and, importantly, in the final secondary school exams. Gifted individuals are motivated for continuous development in various areas of life. They are usually eloquent, well-read, and possess a rich vocabulary. Additionally, they are often socially engaged (Kamińska 2021: 38). These individuals have clearly defined interests and pursue them with determination, surpassing their peers in terms of ability and academic performance, and they are likely to achieve large success in the future. They are also characterized by non-intellectual traits, such as an exceptional, charismatic personality (Porzucek-Miśkiewicz 2022: 37). Gifted individuals generally value their cognitive abilities highly and are focused on achieving academic success, pursuing their goals systematically and skillfully (Gierczyk 2019: 146).

However, gifted individuals also face challenges, often emotional and social. They may be hyperactive and are sometimes perceived as socially maladjusted. It is not uncommon for them to isolate themselves from their peer group or be rejected by it (Borzym 1979: 55).

## Outline of the methodology

For this article, qualitative research was conducted within an interpretative paradigm. The aim was to explore the place of religion in the lives of gifted individuals. The main research question was: "What place does religion occupy in the lives of gifted people?" The technique of proxemic analysis, developed by Anna Walulik and

Zbigniew Marek, was used. This method involves extracting actors and their network of interrelationships from the text, identifying the place and time of the utterance, isolating their values, and establishing the mutual expectations of the actors towards each other (Walulik 2022: 131). While this technique was helpful in determining the place of religion in the lives of gifted individuals, not all the mentioned categories could be extracted. Primarily, the mutual expectations of the respondents and, to a lesser extent, their professed values, were identified.

The research material comprised the personal narratives of four gifted individuals who shared their educational experiences. They also discussed their relationship with God and their attitudes towards faith and religion. These individuals excelled in their secondary school final exams, achieving nearly perfect scores. During their high school years, they participated in subject competitions and achieved high results. They are currently studying at some of the best universities in Poland.

### Analysis of the author's own research and pedagogical implications

The study analyzed narratives from four gifted individuals (pseudonyms: Katarzyna, Joanna, Konrad, and Jacek) to preserve their anonymity.

The first narrator, Katarzyna, resides in Cracow with her parents and older sister. Her mother directs a kindergarten; while Katarzyna does not mention her father's profession. Her older sister works as a foreign language translator and is happily married. Katarzyna attended a Catholic primary school followed by a secondary school run by the Salesians, where she excelled in all subjects on her final exams. Demonstrating both general learning ability and a specific linguistic ability, she achieved academic success through high motivation and conscientiousness. During the interview, she displayed good manners, a rich vocabulary, and a friendly attitude towards other people. Katarzyna exhibited intrinsic motivation, particularly in mastering Italian, and demonstrated creativity by organizing excellent learning environment at school, both domestically and abroad in

Italy. Throughout the interview, she emphasized her close bond with her sister and parents. However, she also revealed struggles with peer rejection she experienced at almost every stage of her schooling.

The main actors in Katarzyna's narrative include God, the catechist, the priest, and friends from her parish. Central to her story is God. Katarzyna said:

*I strive to make God the most important value in my life, to put Him first. The relationship with God differs from human relationships because it lacks direct, physical contact.*

Katarzyna views her relationship with God as paramount, despite its ethereal and intangible nature. While acknowledging the absence of physical interaction common in human relationships, that is, experiences through the senses, Katarzyna affirms her personal connection with God. However, this was not always true for her. The narrator reflected:

*There was a time in my life when I walked away from God. I even questioned whether I should receive the sacrament of Confirmation under such circumstances. However, there came a time when I started to wonder about the meaning of life and the point of our actions on earth. Without God, life felt so empty that it made me deeply sad. I started to wonder: if there is no God, where is my life heading, and what is its worth? This emptiness was somewhat frightening, and it led me back to God, making me realize that faith was essential in my life.*

For Katarzyna, living without God brought a sense of hopelessness and sadness. She found no meaning or purpose in such a life. She compared her life with God's presence to her life without it and chose to live a life of faith because it felt more complete and fulfilling. Despite moments of doubt, abandoning her faith and questioning whether she should nurture her faith and proceed with Confirmation, she ultimately returned to her faith. This period of doubt seemed brief, as the narrator refers to it as a "moment" and does not talk about any of its deeper negative effects.

Katarzyna expected God to provide deep meaning to her life and this is what happened. Following Anna Walulik and Zbigniew Marek's interpretations, it appears the narrator sought personal growth and maturity by integrating faith into her daily life (Marek 2020: 12). For her, faith was crucial to managing everyday responsibilities, choices,

and problems. In Katarzyna’s narrative, other key figures include the parish youth group and the priest.

*A group in the parish that formed after the youth days helped me a lot. It was led by a young priest and had about ten people. They made me feel accepted for who I am.*

Katarzyna felt welcomed by the parish group, unlike her class group, which was mainly made up of her peers. She emphasized that she felt comfortable and part of the group, likely experiencing a sense of community that was very important to her well-being. The narrator expected acceptance and friendship from her parish friends and the priest who led the group. Her friends expected the same from her, and they reciprocated by offering support to each other.

Katarzyna’s experience supports Anna Walulik’s idea that a parish can serve as a “social asylum” where individuals maintain special relationships and receive various forms of support—spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and even material (Walulik 2012a).

The catechist is also significant in Katarzyna’s narrative, serving as a role model of a believer and motivating her to develop and cultivate her faith. The narrator stated:

*After I came back to God, I started going to Confirmation preparation classes, led by a very nice catechist who showed me a deep, practical faith for everyday life. At that time, it was important for me to see that she was a layperson who showed me that it was possible to live Christian values not only as a priest or in a religious order but also while having a family and a job. It showed me that living in the so-called normal world, you don’t have to give up what our faith offers. This has made faith the most important thing for me. I try to make it deep, thoughtful, and not just superficial.*

The narrator expected the catechist to set an example of living faith in secular life, which greatly inspired her, and helped her prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation. The catechist fulfilled these expectations. Thanks to her guidance, Katarzyna found it easier to apply this advice to her daily life and practice her faith. She did not find the example of consecrated people as impactful, preferring to relate to someone who balanced faith with family and everyday roles she recognized from her own life. The catechist, in turn, expected Katarzyna to prepare for the sacrament and grow in her faith with her help. They shared a similar understanding of faith in God, remained

significant to each other and experienced faith similarly, although this was fulfilled in their different life contexts.

Katarzyna's story aligns with James W. Fowler's concept of faith, which suggests that, in general, people search for life's meaning and hold values such as love and respect before finding God. This search, even if a person is not fully aware of it or claims disbelief, often leads to spirituality and religiosity. Fowler argues that faith is a process of understanding and finding meaning in life that is born from personal attachment to values. These values help integrate life experiences and provide meaning to events, relationships, memories, and future aspirations (Fowler 1981: 5). Katarzyna's journey illustrates Fowler's concept well. During her search for God and the meaning of life, even while feeling lost, she continued to be guided by values such as love and kindness, which indicates that faith was quietly burning in her heart, i.e. it was always present, though she might not have seen it that way.

Another aspect of Katarzyna's narrative is her openness to gaining religious knowledge, as evidenced by her desire to prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation. Although she did not go into detail, it is likely that she aimed to deepen her religious understanding, which Anna Walulik emphasizes as important (Walulik 2017: 184). Religious knowledge can play an important role in achieving a sense of harmony and balance in the individual, social and transcendental areas. It provides a sense of order, also in the intellectual sphere (Walulik 2012a: 294).

The second narrator is Joanna, an only child living with her family in Cracow. Her story does not reveal much about her parents. Joanna is not only talented in general but also musically gifted. She also mentioned her skills in teaching math to children and her involvement in sports. However, her childhood and teenage years were heavily focused on music—specifically playing an instrument and attending music school alongside primary school. In her narrative, Joanna emphasized experiencing burnout from excessive practice, which led to health and emotional issues.

The key actors in Joanna's narrative include: God, faith, and prayer. Unlike in Katarzyna's story, there are no significant people mentioned in Joanna's life. The most crucial aspect for Joanna is her faith, which she considers a central value. She recalled:

*I was receiving neurological treatment and was told that my migraines were dangerous. I started taking medication that made me lose consciousness, worsened my concentration, and caused dark circles under my eyes. One night, when I couldn't stand the tension any longer, I started praying to God, and that was when my life began to change. God and faith helped me regain my self-confidence. I realized that I didn't have to play an instrument; that I wasn't destined to do so. I needed to balance my strengths with my intentions and approach things rationally. Faith gave me the clarity to decide not to play anymore, even though I made this decision just two months before my secondary school exams. Faith was an important factor because I didn't have support from my family.*

Joanna turned to God, faith, and prayer for encouragement, clarity about her life, self-confidence in her own abilities, and support in making the right life decisions. She found this support to be reassuring and effective. She discovered her faith during a period of profound loss and despair, when it seemed to her that nothing could help her and that her hope for a normal, happy life was fading. Emotionally and physically exhausted from hours of practicing music, she reached out to God in fervent prayer and total surrender. After fervent prayer and complete surrender to God, Joanna came to realize she needed to change her conduct, since her previous actions had led to negative outcomes. She decided to turn her life around and was successful in doing so. She sought God's guidance in choosing a career path in line with her interests perhaps even her mission and vocation. Her parents, who she felt were pushing her toward a career in professional music, did not offer the support she needed. Instead, God provided her with the strength to defy her parents' expectations and make her own individual and, as it turned out, correct choice. This moment of profound encounter with God was soothing, healing and inspiring, and marked an irreversible, positive shift in her life. Without God and faith, she believes she would not have been able to make this change.

In Joanna's case, her ability to connect with others is also noteworthy. Zbigniew Marek emphasizes that faith helps people consider not only themselves but also others. Through faith, people learn to build meaningful relationships and establish lasting social bonds, which can alleviate feelings of loneliness. According to Ignatian pedagogy, a relationship with God is central to these connections. Starting with a relationship with God, people then develop and nurture

their relationships with others, progressing through stages of personal development into successive stages that link them with the wider world (Marek 2017: 162). Joanna exemplified this transition: from solitude to a relationship with God, and then to forming connections with others, including friends from her studies and, eventually, her future students, as she aspires to be a teacher.

Although Joanna seems to have taken this step quite late in life, when her illness was more advanced and she felt depressed, she did so despite lacking supportive role models in her family. Her parents did not accompany her on her journey to God, discovering herself and pursuing her interests. She had to find her own path in a situation that was difficult for her, but she succeeded. There is a high probability that in the future she will, in turn, help others navigate similar journeys, and thus contribute to the spread of faith and the development of meaningful relationships with those around her.

The next narrator is Konrad, who lives with his parents and siblings in Cracow. He comes from a multi-generational family where parents and grandparents play an active role in raising children and shaping their worldview. His mother is a teacher, and he does not mention his father's profession. Currently, Konrad is a science student at a prestigious technical university in Cracow. He excelled in his secondary school exams, scoring 100 percent in all subjects, and was a top competitor in academic contests throughout junior and senior high school. His high grades, willingness to help fellow students, and adherence to ethical values have earned him considerable admiration from both teachers and peers.

Konrad is quite open about himself. He frankly describes himself as a perfectionist and a social worker who enjoys helping others and feels fulfilled by being useful. He is a fast learner with an aptitude for mathematics and a keen interest in the complexities of language. He remains resilient in the face of adversity and is determined to achieve his personal goals. In Konrad's narrative, the central themes are faith, religion, family, and what he refers to as "the contemporary person." Unlike other narrators, such as Katarzyna and Joanna, he does not discuss or describe other actors, including God.

Raised in the Christian faith Konrad considers it a vital part of his life. He practices his faith on a daily basis with his immediate family. He adds: "I am a believer and I go to church. In my family,



everyone is religious, and it forms the foundation of our family life.” For him, faith provides inspiration for cultivating a positive attitude towards himself and others.

*When you think about it and compare it with other religions, you'll find that Christianity offers principles for everyday life. These principles encourage us not to focus selfishly only on ourselves, but to be mindful of others, to be part of a community and to help those in need. They represent a set of common, similar and desirable behaviors.*

He believes that Christian principles related to community life can benefit anyone seeking happiness: “Even if someone is not deeply religious, following these principles will bring some satisfaction in their life.” Konrad is attentive to others’ needs and sees helping them as an intrinsically valuable pursuit that also brings him personal satisfaction. His perspective on faith largely revolves around its impact on interpersonal relationships. He also underscores other values that flow from religion, such as truthfulness, trust, readiness to help, and sensitivity to the needs of the most vulnerable. Konrad mentions the importance of the connection between truthfulness and trust.

*Trust is the foundation of strong family relationships, allowing us to rely on others and seek their support when we have a problem. It also means we should be ready to offer help when those we trust need us.*

Konrad values “the ability to recognize those who are genuinely in need, especially those who might feel ashamed when they have to ask for or accept help.” He expects his family to share and nurture his faith, and vice versa, faith being an important bond that strengthens their relationships. For Konrad, religion should underpin interpersonal connections and equip him with the right principles needed to thrive in society. This will enable him and others to live a happier life.

In his speech, Konrad also criticizes selfish individuals who fail to see the world around them. He attributes this disconnection from one’s surroundings mainly to excessive use and dependence on modern technology. He contrasts this with the values of empathy and engagement:

*The opposite of these values is a growing indifference towards others, largely driven by technological progress. Nowadays, people often have headphones in, eyes glued to their phones, and the internet constantly on, and barely notice anything and anybody around them. People tend to isolate themselves because*

*they do not feel responsible for others and their problems. They often prefer to ignore these issues, as acknowledging them would mean they might have to help—and they're reluctant to do that. Conversely, if they do want to help but choose not to, they end up feeling guilty. This problem is getting worse in Polish society; what was once an issue mostly among younger people is now affecting older generations as well. While I see the benefits of technology and use it myself, especially for my studies, it's crucial that it doesn't lead to addiction and isolation.*

While Konrad expects those he encounters to exhibit altruism and empathy and to be helpful to others, his expectations have unfortunately, often been unmet.

In addition, love is an important value for Konrad. He says that:

*When you are loved and love others, life feels so much richer. I understand it when someone chooses to live alone or when a young man decides to become a priest. I understand everything, but I know that love has the power to transform a person; it can change them enough to be willing to make sacrifices.*

Likely influenced by his Christian upbringing, Konrad is self-critical and aware of his imperfections, which he actively works on:

*I also try to be aware of my negative traits and behaviors. My relationship with myself is not the easiest because I sometimes act or say things that surprise even me. These surprises can be positive or negative. I have a lot of different ideas, retorts and responses in my head—often humorous but sometimes pushing the boundaries of good taste. Occasionally, I say things that might not sit well with others, which can create problems. So it's difficult to know yourself, because it really all depends on the situation, and you might act unpredictably.*

Konrad suggests that his faith will help him grow, and keep him self-critical and self-demanding. He believes that faith will provide him with the motivation and strength to overcome his weaknesses and limitations.

The narrator depicts a mature social attitude and a desire for self-improvement, under the influence of his values. He is not entirely satisfied with who he is and what he represents but strives to better himself in his relationships with other people and through self-reflection. He seeks a fulfilling and harmonious life with his loved ones and those around him. According to Janusz Mariański, such a narrator views religion as a socio-moral value and a remedy for emerging social problems, and appreciates the role of religion in everyday social life (Mariański 2004: 30).

The last narrator is Jacek, who comes from a Christian family where faith has always been integral to family life. His parents are doctors, and he does not mention any siblings. Jacek seems to be shy and finds social interactions very challenging. He seeks a mentor—a master he can follow. He is highly motivated to learn and has both general and specific abilities, especially in history. He does sports to strengthen his body. Like Konrad's, Jacek's narrative includes family, faith, and religion. Unlike Katarzyna and Joanna, he does not mention God or prayer in his account.

The narrator begins by saying, "My family is religious, and that is why I continue to cultivate the Christian faith and tradition even as an adult." He stresses the importance of religious practice in his life: "The Christian faith, although it was not explored intellectually or theoretically in my family, commands me, above all, to be honest and helpful to the weak and needy." Jacek recognizes that he has not read much about faith. He feels a strong desire to be useful to others, especially those who struggle to manage on their own. He highly values honesty and, and he strives to live it out daily. In addition to his faith, the narrator also appreciates the value of family. His appreciation for it developed later, likely due to a temporary separation from his relatives or even losing contact with them.

*I came to appreciate family quite late, i.e. when I grew up and realized that nothing is given to us forever, that people pass away, that certain things cannot be returned to. Family ties were not verbally emphasized as a value in my family. However, as an adult I realized how important they are.*

Like Konrad, Jacek looks to his family for support and a shared experience of faith. It seems that Jacek's family expects the same from him. For Jacek, the most important thing is to be good to others. He believes that faith is precisely what shapes the right human attitudes in his life.

This sentiment corresponds with Janusz Mariański's observation that young people are generally morally sensitive and strive to live according to Christian values, respecting tradition, family, and the ties that bind family members together (Mariański 2004: 31).

When summarizing their accounts, Katarzyna and Joanna both explicitly mention God and faith. They have encountered God on their path of faith—Joanna through prayer, and Katarzyna through

reflection and thought about her life. For them, contact with God is essential, as it changes their lives for the better and gives meaning to their actions and their whole existence. God occupies a very important place in their personal and professional lives. They established and maintained contact with God on their own, inspired by the difficulties they were experiencing and their sense of meaninglessness in their lives. The narrators consider their relationship with God as the most important one, influencing everything else: the quality of their lives, their self-perception, their relationships with others, and their success at university and work. They were not encouraged to seek contact with God by their parents or at least they do not mention this and do not mention whether their families are believers. They found their way to God independently, not through social or family traditions. For them, the encounter with God is very important. This individual approach to the role of religion and faith in the lives of talented people stems from personal reflection.

Konrad and Jacek, on the other hand, emphasize that their families—parents and grandparents—have been believers, so they naturally continue the tradition of Christian faith. They cannot imagine their family or social life without it. The practical aspects of living according to Christian principles are important to them, and they both try to follow these guidelines, particularly those related to relationships with family, community, and others. These include honesty and helping those in need. They observe that some people around them, both younger and older, prioritize technological innovations over good interpersonal relationships. For Konrad and Jacek, moral principles stemming from the Christian faith are the essential foundation of social life. However, they do not discuss their personal relationships with God, meeting God in prayer, or self-reflection influenced by encounters with God. This approach to religion and faith can be described as cultural and social.

Analyzing the narrators' statements reveals that religion occupies an important place in the lives of these gifted individuals. It aids in their personal development, helping them become integrated individuals who make decisions based on their abilities, interests, and needs. Belief in God enables them to define their path in life in line with their values. Religion directly facilitates their maturation. Through religion, they share a life philosophy with loved ones

(with their families and friends, including those in the parish), build a community, and become an integral part of it. They have been able to overcome feelings of emptiness, loss, and meaninglessness, gaining a sense of protection by God, which motivates them to engage in activities that were conducive to their development rather than feeling frustrated, depressed, ill or destructive, as was previously the case for some respondents. Religion, especially its cultural and social aspects, helps them shape their identity and navigate interpersonal relationships. Through religion and faith, their relationships with others gain meaning and quality. Acting according to Christian guidelines brings them satisfaction and allows them to evaluate whether others follow similar principles, which enhances their understanding of social relationships.

Another insight from analyzing the narrators' statements is that many gifted individuals with high intellectual potential and strong academic achievements are also deeply religious and take their faith seriously. The respondents emphasized their desire to broaden and deepen their religious knowledge. Gifted people often have a strong curiosity and a passion for learning: they enjoy exploring, inquiring, and solving problems. Some respondents acknowledged their own shortcomings in this respect. They believe that a deeper understanding of their faith can help them better comprehend and shape their relationships with loved ones and their social environment. For contemporary people, especially those with strong cognitive abilities, mere belief is not enough; they also want to intellectually explore the world around them.

Therefore, educational approaches should view the human person as whole, not just their intellectual capabilities but also their emotional and spiritual dimensions. Only through the balanced development of all these aspects can one achieve complete personal growth and contribute to both their own happiness and that of others. Talented individuals are not only knowledgeable and educated but also tend to uphold high moral standards.

Caregivers, parents, and teachers play a crucial role in nurturing faith among young generations and supporting them in their daily lives and growth. Young individuals need positive personal and religious role models to guide and inspire them.

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# Religiosity of Young Germans and Religious Education in German State Schools

## ABSTRACT

The article presents empirical data illustrating the value system of young Germans and the position played by religiosity within it. It refers to *Shell Jugendstudie* youth research, which was carried out in 2015 and 2019 (the penultimate and ultimate youth studies published). The basic legal acts relating to religious education in state schools are also described. Examples of solutions regarding teaching religion and ethics that are practiced in different federal states of Germany are also shown.

## Introduction

German law sanctions the freedom of religion and religious beliefs. Article 4 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_4.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_4.html) [access: 7.05.2023]) guarantees freedom of religion, conscience, and religious and philosophical beliefs. It also guarantees the possibility of the undisturbed practice of religion. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of German citizens for whom religion played an important role remained relatively stable (cf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/264229/umfrage/lebenseinstellung-bedeutung-von-religion-und-fester-glaubensueberzeugung/> [access: 7.05.2023]).

## KEYWORDS:

religion, religiosity,  
religious lessons,  
Germany, youth studies

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In 2018, 16.51 million German citizens reported that religion was important in their lives; in 2019—17.2 million; in 2020—17.77 million; in 2021—17.49 million. In 2022, 17.1 million Germans over the age of 14 stated that religion was very important in their lives and that stable, religious convictions were equally important to them. According to Eurostat data, which illustrates involvement in the activities of the Church or other religious communities, 16.8% of Germans aged 16 and over are involved in such activity (overall, in the 27 EU countries, such involvement is rated at 21.4 %) (cf. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth\\_ds040/default/table?lang=de](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_ds040/default/table?lang=de) [access: 7.05.2023]).

According to data from representative research on the opinions of EU member states—Eurobarometer Spezial 484 (12/2018) (cf. <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/145148/religion/> [access: 8.05.2023]), 28.6% of German respondents considered themselves to be Catholic, 25.8% Protestant, and 26.9% non-believers (atheists, agnostics). Additionally, 7.6% belonged to another Christian religious community, and 3.5% were Muslim. Orthodox faith was declared by 2.2% of the survey participants, 0.7% identified as Buddhists, and 0.1% as Jewish. Similarly, 0.1% of the respondents claimed to be Hinduists. It is notable that the confessional declarations of the respondents differ between the federal states (states formed from the areas of the former German Democratic Republic and the former Federal Republic of Germany). Sixty-eight-point three percent of respondents from the former GDR declared themselves to be non-believers (with 6.0% considering themselves Catholics and 9.7% Protestants). In contrast, only 16.6% of respondents from the former FRG declared themselves to be non-believers (with 34.3% considering themselves Catholics and 29.8% Protestants).

The objective of this article is to describe the findings of selected studies on the value system of young Germans and the status of religious education in German public schools. Due to the nature of this study, an arbitrary selection of empirical research results from renowned research institutes as well as data from official sources have been used. Thus, the article should not be considered exhaustive or definitive.

## Young Germans' world of values and religiosity

There is no doubt that values give meaning to human life. It is important that individuals not only accept but also analyze and create their value systems (Ostrowska 2006: 413). Religions and their underlying concepts of humanity can serve as guideposts in times of moral ambiguity and freedom of choice, particularly in a world driven by economic growth and profit. This article utilizes empirical data from the representative Shell Jugendstudie youth studies (cf. <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/initiativen/shell-jugendstudie/ueber-die-shell-jugendstudie.html> [access: 10.05.2023]), published in 2015 and 2019. These studies, often referred to as the “Bible of youth research,” have been conducted periodically since 1953 to document the situation, moods, expectations, and worldviews of German youth.

The seventeenth edition of the youth study, titled *Jugend 2015. Eine pragmatische Generation im Aufbruch* [Youth 2015. The Pragmatic Generation at the Start], involved a representative sample of 2,558 young Germans aged 12 to 25. Conducted between January and mid-March 2015, the survey used a standardized questionnaire. The eighteenth and latest edition, *Jugend 2019. Eine Generation meldet sich zu Wort* [Youth 2019. The Generation Speaks Up], surveyed 2,572 young Germans aged 12 to 25, also using a standardized questionnaire from early January to mid-March 2019.

The results from the eighteenth edition indicate that young Germans possess a strong value system (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel 2015). Most young Germans live with their families of origin, where they learn to build relationships and develop their personalities. They appreciate values traditionally associated with social life and self-reliance. For example, industriousness and a love of order were important to 82% of respondents. General principles of social life were deemed more important than creativity (79%) and enjoyment of life (80%). Having good friends was very important to 97% of respondents, and 93% valued having a trustworthy partner. Family life was important to 90% of respondents, leading a responsible life to 88%, respecting law and order to 84%, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle to 80%. Faith in God was significant to 33% of the respondents (cf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/507536/umfrage/wertorientierungen-von-jugendlichen-in-deutschland/> [access: 12.05.2023]).

Religiosity was not highly ranked among the values of young Germans surveyed in 2015. While they did not deny the need for the Church and appreciated its social functions, they felt that the Church did not provide answers to the important questions in their lives (*Zusammenfassung...* 2015: 30). Despite this, the majority of young Germans declared membership in some religious community or Church (*Zusammenfassung...* 2015: 30). However, only 38% of the young respondents who identified as Christian considered belief in God important. Among Muslim youth, 81% deemed belief in God significant.

In 2015, young Germans who identified as non-religious were a minority, making up 23% of the survey population (*Zusammenfassung...* 2015: 30). Nevertheless, a substantial portion of these young people supported the institution of the Church, with 42% thinking it was good that the Church exists. In contrast, 39% felt the Church should not exist (19% gave no response).

The 17th edition of the youth study revealed differences in religiosity between young Germans from East and West Germany (*Zusammenfassung...* 2015: 30). Belief in God was not important for 68% of respondents in the “new” federal states, whereas 45% of respondents from West Germany considered belief in God important.

The most recent, 18th edition of the youth studies, titled *Jugend 2019. Eine Generation meldet sich zu Wort*, continued to emphasize values related to relationships (cf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/507464/umfrage/wertorientierungen-von-jugendlichen/> [access: 25.05.2023]). In 2019, as in 2015, 97% of participants declared that having good friends was important. Having a trustworthy partner was crucial for 94% of respondents (up 1 percentage point from 2015), and a good family life remained important for 90% (unchanged from 2015). Independence from others, order, and respect for the law were significant for 84% of participants, which is consistent with 2015 figures. Hard work and ambition were important for 80% (a decrease of 2 percentage points from 2015), and health was also valued by 80%. Seventy one percent of young Germans found environmental awareness important in 2019, an increase of 5 percentage points from 2015. Having a high standard of living was significant for 63% (down from 69% in 2015), and prioritizing personal needs over others’ needs was important for 48% (a decrease

of 9 percentage points from 2015). Belief in God was important for 39% of respondents, an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015 (cf. <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/initiativen/shell-jugendstudie/alle-schaubilder-und-grafiken.html> [access: 26.05.2023]). However, 41% of participants did not consider faith in God significant (cf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1073241/umfrage/wichtigkeit-des-glaubens-an-gott-bei-jugendlichen/> [access: 26.05.2023]). Among young Muslims, faith in God was important to 73% , while only 24% of Protestant youth found it significant (Albert et al. 2019: 26).

In 2019, as in 2015, the Church continued to be viewed positively. Regardless of their religion, 69% of respondents believed that the Church's existence is beneficial (75% of Catholic youth, 79% of Protestant Evangelical youth, and 45% of non-believing youth shared this sentiment) (Albert et al. 2019: 26).

Overall, based on the 2015 and 2019 Shell Jugendstudie youth studies, it can be concluded that young Germans generally maintain a stable value system. Differences in the percentages of declared values were relatively minor. Relationships with friends, partners, and family members were important to respondents, as well as values related to personal independence and social life. Notably, a high percentage of respondents declared health as an important value, even though the survey was conducted before the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The Shell Jugendstudie study shows that belief in God did not rank high in the value system of young Germans. Researchers note a significant decrease in the importance of faith in God over a 17-year period. In 2002 (the fourteenth edition of the youth study), 51% of participants said that faith was important to them, while in 2019 (the eighteenth edition), only 39% expressed this view (with a decrease of 12 percentage points among Catholic youth) (cf. <https://www.shell.de/ueber-uns/initiativen/shell-jugendstudie/alle-schaubilder-und-grafiken.html> [access: 31.05.2023]). Among Evangelical youth, the importance of belief in God also declined, from 38% in 2002 to 24% in 2019 (a drop of 14 percentage points) (cf. <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/23265-christliche-jugendliche-in-deutschland-glauben-immer-weniger-an-gott> [access: 31.05.2023]).

## Legal basis for religious education in German state schools: Introduction

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the organization of schools is the responsibility of the individual states. The Ministries of Education (Kultusministerien) of the sixteen states determine matters related to education and upbringing, which can lead to differences in curriculum plans and the range of subjects taught. The states may also organize the permeability between the different elements of the education system in various ways. Additionally, the federal states' ministries of education oversee adult education, culture and the arts, and relations between the state and religious communities. At the supra-regional level, the Permanent Conference of the Ministers of Education of the States of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*, KMK) coordinates educational and cultural policy issues. Consequently, religious education in state schools is the responsibility of the states, and its form may vary from one state to another. This article deals with issues related to state schooling.

The legal basis for religious education is outlined in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany. Article 4 of this Law guarantees freedom of religion, conscience, religious and philosophical beliefs, and the possibility of undisturbed religious practice. Article 7 of the Basic Law stipulates that religious instruction in state schools is a compulsory subject (except in non-denominational schools) and must be taught in accordance with the rules of the respective religious communities (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_7.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_7.html) [access: 1.06.2023]). As religious instruction is defined as a compulsory subject, pupils are required to participate in religious education and receive marks, which are considered for promotion to the next grade. Furthermore, Article 140 of the Basic Law (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_140.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_140.html) [access: 1.06.2023]). mandates that the state maintain a neutral stance towards faith communities and not identify with any of them (there is no state Church). However, religious practice is not solely a personal matter for believers; it is also supported by the German state (Article 4, para. 2 of the Basic Law stipulates that “The state guarantees undisturbed practice of religion”). Therefore, religious practice is a public

matter and requires cooperation between state institutions and faith communities.

According to the principle of neutrality towards religious communities, the German state cannot organize religious education on its own; instead, these tasks are carried out by the religious communities themselves. In some federal states, agreements have been made between the Catholic and Protestant Churches and the ministries of education regarding cooperative forms of religious education (*Zur Situation des Katholischen Religionsunterrichts...* 2002: 9). For example, religion lessons in schools focus on teaching the Christian faith from either the Catholic or Evangelical perspective, rather than Christianity as such. It is the leaders of such faith communities who decide on the content and the teachers for these lessons. The state and the faith communities jointly monitor and ensure that the teaching content complies with the Basic Law. In accordance with the equality clause guaranteed by Article 3, para. 3 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany no one can be discriminated against based on their political or religious views (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_3.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_3.html) [access: 2.06.2023]). Therefore, religious education lessons cannot be restricted to Christian content only. For example, in North Rhine-Westphalia, the Ministry of Education has set a requirement for a minimum number of participants to organize religion lessons in state schools. If a school has twelve pupils of a particular religion, religious education will be organized for them accordingly (cf. <https://bass.schul-welt.de/5125.htm> [access: 2.06.2023]).

In Germany, parents (legal guardians) can decide on their child's participation in religion lessons. Article 7, para. 2 of the Basic Law stipulates that parents have the right to decide on their children's religious education (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_7.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_7.html) [access: 5.06.2023]). According to the *Reichsgesetz über religiöse Kindererziehung* of July 15, 1921, which is still in force, parents (legal guardians) decide on the religious education of their children up to the age of 12. From the age of 14, children can decide for themselves whether or not to attend religious education classes, a concept referred to as "religious maturity" (*Religionsmündigkeit*). An exception to this rule exists in Bavaria and Saarland, where students can decide for themselves whether or not to attend religious education

classes at the age of 18 (*Zur Situation des Katholischen Religionsunterrichts...* 2002: 7).

## Differentiation of teaching subjects: A review of selected educational offers for religious education in German state schools

In the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, only religion is explicitly listed as a subject of study. However, the teaching of religion is currently the subject of public debate in the context of social change and various interpretations of spirituality. Today, faith and religious practice are increasingly seen as personal choices, and there is axionormative pluralism and the emergence of new religious communities.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, religious education takes two main forms (Spielhaus, Štimac 2018: 42). The first form is denominational, such as Catholic or Evangelical education, and has been extended to include the teaching of other religions such as Alevi, Buddhist, Orthodox, and Islamic). The second form consists of alternative subjects offered by schools as either optional or compulsory courses. This article will focus on the exemplary educational offerings concerning this second form of religious education.

As mentioned, Article 7 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany stipulates that religious instruction in state schools is a compulsory subject, except in non-denominational schools, and is to be taught in accordance with the rules of the respective faith communities (cf. [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art\\_7.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_7.html) [access: 1.06.2023]). However, in some federal states, alternative subjects have been incorporated into the curricula (Spielhaus, Štimac 2018: 42). For instance, in Berlin, religious education related to specific confessions is offered as an optional subject, delivered by the faith communities themselves with financial support from the Berlin Senate. The grades in this subject do not affect promotion to higher grades. Since 2006, a compulsory subject called “Ethics” has been introduced for students in years 7–10 (cf. [https://bildungsserver.berlin-brandenburg.de/fileadmin/bbb/unterricht/rahmenlehrplaene/Rahmenlehrplanprojekt/amtliche\\_Fassung/](https://bildungsserver.berlin-brandenburg.de/fileadmin/bbb/unterricht/rahmenlehrplaene/Rahmenlehrplanprojekt/amtliche_Fassung/)

Teil\_C\_Ethik\_2015\_11\_10\_WEB.pdf [access: 15.06.2023]). This subject focuses on a person's relationships with oneself, others, and the environment, and on helping students explore the question of what is a good life and how it should be lived.

Another example is the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, which follows the model of Hamburg (*Religion. Bildungsplan...* 2014: 4). In Bremen, religious education covers various religious issues and worldviews (*Religion. Bildungsplan...* 2014: 4–5). This subject is not dedicated to a specific religion and is not intended to instruct followers of a particular confession.

A different approach to religious education was introduced in the state of Brandenburg. Starting in the 2008/2009 school year, the state of Brandenburg introduced the subject “Lifestyle—Ethics—Religious Studies” for grades 5–10 (cf. <https://mbjs.brandenburg.de/bildung/weitere-themen/lebensgestaltung-ethik-religionskunde-l-e-r.html> [access: 16.06.2023]). This subject aims to impart knowledge in ethics and religious studies and develop skills for leading a value-oriented life. It maintains a neutral stance on worldviews and religions and is not intended to substitute traditional religious education.

Table 1 shows the nomenclature for ethics lessons (understood as a general term for a group of substitute subjects) used in different federal states.

**Table 1.** Names of substitute subjects in the educational offers of individual federal states

Federal state	Name of the subject
Baden-Württemberg	Ethics
Bavaria	Ethics
Berlin	Ethics, Philosophy (General Education in Secondary Schools)
Brandenburg	Lifestyle—Ethics—Religious Studies
Bremen	Philosophy
Lower Saxony	Values and Norms
Hamburg	Philosophy
Hesse	Ethics
Saarland	General Ethics
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Philosophy for Children (Grades 1–10), Philosophy (Secondary School)

Federal state	Name of the subject
North Rhine-Westphalia	Practical Philosophy/Philosophy
Rhineland-Palatinate	Ethics
Saxony	Ethics
Saxony-Anhalt	Ethics Lesson
Schleswig-Holstein	Philosophy
Thuringia	Ethics

Based on: *Zur Situation des Unterrichts in den Fächern Ethik...* 2020: 5–6.

According to the Permanent Conference of the Ministers of Education of the States of the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK), the overriding goal of teaching ethics (understood as a general term for a group of substitute subjects) is to develop ethical competence to navigate a rapidly changing world, including technological advancements (cf. <https://www.kmk.org/themen/allgemeinbildende-schulen/unterrichtsfacher/religion-ethik-philosophie.html> [access: 20.06.2023]). Ethics education aims to improve students’ competence in forming and articulating their views and judgements, and to prepare them for responsible action. The nomenclature for ethics teaching varies (see Table 1), with subjects such as “Values and Norms,” “Lifestyle—Ethics—Religious Studies,” and “Philosophy” offered across federal states. Ethics education is provided at the secondary level in all federal states and at the primary level in some. In most states, it has the status of a subject substituting religious education and is treated as a compulsory or elective subject.

In most federal states, participation in ethics lessons is compulsory for students who do not belong to a religious confession, are not assigned to a specific religious education, or for whom no religious education is provided (*Zur Situation des Unterrichts in den Fächern Ethik...* 2020: 8). From the 2020/2021 school year, ethics education was provided from grade 6, and from the 2021/2022 school year, from grade 5 in all comprehensive schools (*Zur Situation des Unterrichts in den Fächern Ethik...* 2020: 13).

The percentage of students participating in religious education lessons is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Students' participation in religious lessons in the school years 2019/2020 and 2021/2022 (%)

Form of teaching RE	School year 2019/2020	School year 2021/2022
Catholic RE lesson	28.3	27.2
Evangelical RE lesson	32.5	31.1
Ethics lessons	21.6	23.1
% of students who do not participate in any form of teaching RE	6.0	6.1
philosophy	5.1	5.5
integrated RE	4.0	4.4
other forms of RE	1.1	1.3
Islamic RE lessons	0.6	0.6
knowledge of Islam	0.4	0.3
substitute subjects	0.4	0.4
Jewish RE lesson	0.01	0.01
Orthodox RE lesson	0.01	0.02

Based on: *Auswertung Religionsunterricht Schuljahr 2019/20 2021: 7; Auswertung Religionsunterricht Schuljahr 2021/22 2022: 7.*

Based on the data presented in Table 2, there is a slight decrease in interest in attending religious education lessons in the 2021/2022 school year compared to 2019/2020. Attendance for Catholic religious education decreased by 1.1 percentage points, and Evangelical religious education saw a decline of 1.4 percentage points. Conversely, there was a 1.5 percentage point increase in the number of pupils attending ethics lessons.

## Conclusion

It seems that religious education in German state schools is currently grappling with two major challenges. First, the secularization of society is leading to a declining interest among young Germans in developing their own religiosity or spirituality. Second, young people are increasingly turning to non-Christian religions for answers to questions that are important to them.

The trend of leaving the Church in Germany has reached the highest level in history. In 2019, 540,000 people departed from both

the Catholic and Protestant Churches. By 2021, this number had risen to 600,000. Projections suggest that by 2060, the combined membership of both Churches could be halved, leaving around 22 million members compared to the current total of 44 million (*Die Zukunft der Kirchen...* 2022: 2). This sharp decline may result in the erosion of Christian traditions and the diminishing role of the Church as a social institution, as it will represent a steadily decreasing number of members. The disappearance of Christian traditions may be important in the context of religious education, since this trend may potentially lead to a reduced interest in denominational religious education among students, particularly if support from their families wanes.

The secularization process is also accompanied by a rise in religious pluralism, which is the aftermath of individualization and the influx of migrants from various religious backgrounds. Germany has become increasingly multi-religious, with a notable presence of religious minorities (*Die Zukunft der Kirchen...* 2022: 2). Currently, Muslims represent the largest religious minority group, with the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministeriums des Innern und für Heimat), estimating between 5.3 and 5.6 million Muslims (primarily Alevis) living in the German Federal Republic, which constitutes approximately 6.4% to 6.7% of the population (cf. <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt/staat-und-religion/islam-in-deutschland/islam-in-deutschland-node.html> [accessed 23.06.2023]). Additionally, there is a growing interest in alternative faith communities, including esotericism, alternative healing practices, meditation, and yoga (cf. [https://www.remid.de/info\\_zahlen/verschiedene/](https://www.remid.de/info_zahlen/verschiedene/) [access 23.06.2023]).

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# Jadwiga Zamoyska's Concept of Education

## ABSTRACT

The Parliament of the Republic of Poland named Jadwiga Zamoyska (1831–1923) one of the patrons of 2023. The centenary of her death falls in November of this year. Among the many activities for which she is admired and appreciated, the closest and most important to her was educating the youth. Patronage of the Year is an initiative that is intended to honor, but also to protect from oblivion, people, events, and ideas that are important to Poland and Poles. This text responds to this objective. The aim of the article is to indicate the universal values of Jadwiga Zamoyska's educational thought. An analytical-synthetic method was used. The basic source is the work titled *O wychowaniu* [On Education], in which Jadwiga Zamoyska presented a program for Catholic upbringing and education. The value of integral human development, obedience, role model, work, and virtue in upbringing was reflected upon. Universal values are beyond differences of time and mindset. After all, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland indicated the life of Jadwiga Zamoyska as an example to all Poles, and not to a specific group. It is interesting to wonder whether there is anything current and valuable in this message for humans made richer by over hundred years of worldwide research and experiments.

## KEYWORDS:

Jadwiga Zamoyska,  
education, obedience,  
role model, work, virtue

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## Introduction

In 2023, the Parliament of the Republic of Poland honored Jadwiga Zamoyska, née Działyńska, as one of the year's patrons, marking the 100th anniversary of her death in November. Zamoyska was a socially committed Polish patriot, wife of General Władysław Zamoyski, mother of four, educator, and servant of God. Among her many achievements, she is particularly esteemed for her commitment to educating the younger generation, something that was very meaningful and important to her (Palka 2006: 25). Amidst the pressures of the Prussian partition, she established the School of Domestic Work in 1882 on a farm near Kórnik, which became the first economic school in Poland and Europe founded by a single individual. The school's guiding principle, and the essence of Jadwiga Zamoyska's life, was: "To serve God by serving the Fatherland; to serve the Fatherland by serving God" (Palka 2007: 18). Her approach to education for work and through work was recognized by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X (Sztaba 2015: 97). Additionally, her support played a pivotal role in her son Władysław's successful efforts to reclaim the Morskie Oko lake for Poland (Parliament of the Republic of Poland, 2022). In 1921, Marshal Józef Piłsudski decorated her with the Polonia Restituta Cross (Palka 2006: 25).

In its resolution, the Parliament of the Republic of Poland acknowledged Jadwiga Zamoyska as the creator of a coherent pedagogical system (Parliament of the Republic of Poland, 2022). This recognition invites reflection on her thoughts on education, particularly since her ideas are considered wise and ahead of her time (Czartoryski-Sziler 2009: 12), and her character, though remarkable, has been largely forgotten (Palka 2006: 25). The initiative of naming a patron of the year serves not only to honor but also to preserve the memory of individuals, events, and ideas significant to Poland and Poles. This article contributes to that intention by calling attention to the universal values in Jadwiga Zamoyska's educational philosophy. Utilizing an analytical-synthetic approach, the article draws primarily from her work *O wychowaniu* [On Education], in which Zamoyska outlined a program for Catholic education and upbringing. Universal values are those that transcend differences in time and worldview, and the Parliament of the Republic of Poland has presented Zamoyska's

life and work as a model for all Poles, not just a specific group. This article explores whether her teachings, more than a century later, still offer relevant and valuable insights for contemporary society.

## The value of integral human development

Development is a natural aspect of human life. It results from the constant discrepancy between a person's potential and their real capabilities. Through development, individuals can increasingly express themselves in a fuller, more authentic way. True development occurs when it encompasses all aspects of self-improvement: physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual. The integration of these dimensions is essential for acquiring the competence to overcome risks in daily life. As Antoniewicz notes, "When any dimension is neglected, development loses its authenticity. It is possible to observe progress in one aspect, but never true comprehensive development" (Antoniewicz 2010: 276). In such cases, individuals may fall short, feeling that the challenges are beyond their capabilities.

Integral development is a fundamental right for everyone, but it requires wise guidance and thoughtful application. Therefore, it should also be viewed as a responsibility, which is inherent in the process of upbringing. The goal of upbringing is to help individuals harmonize the various dimensions within themselves to realize their developmental potential. As Łobacz explains: "In the process of development, a person first becomes aware of their body, then their psyche, particularly their emotional experiences. It is only later that they discover the moral, spiritual, social, and religious dimensions of life. What ties these dimensions together and gives them meaning is the individual, who transcends the limitations and possibilities of their own humanity" (Łobacz 2019: 60).

A reductionist approach to understanding the human being, which selectively emphasizes certain dimensions of development while neglecting others, undermines the theory and practice of education. The omission of any dimension is detrimental, as each is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the human person. This is by no means a new issue; Jadwiga Zamoyska recognized this problem in her own time. She observed that while people of her era

took pride in scientific progress and technological advancements, this focus often came at the expense of moral and spiritual development:

There is rightful pride in the advancements of knowledge and inventions inspired by science. Each new discovery serves as a gateway to further progress and breakthroughs. However, as knowledge advances in the material realm, with scholars gaining deeper insights into the laws of nature and harnessing new forces with remarkable precision, a contrasting trend emerges in the moral and spiritual domains. (Zamoyska 2002: 9)

According to Zamoyska, morality and spirituality are the most neglected dimensions of development. These same aspects are often cited today as the root cause of human “weakness.” Antoniewicz (2010) confirms this by stating:

The experience of inner emptiness, numerous neuroses, and feelings of social or psychological alienation often defy explanations offered by medical, sociological, or psychological perspectives. Therapeutic interventions frequently fail to provide solutions, as these issues often stem from a spiritual basis, and it is here that their solution should be sought. (Antoniewicz 2010: 272)

Given that Zamoyska accurately diagnosed these issues in her time, it is valuable to consider the solutions she proposed. Her remedies are deeply rooted in the principles of upbringing.

## The purpose of education and the value of obedience

The ancient philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, who lived around the 5th and 4th centuries BC, famously wandered the city with a lit lamp, proclaiming, “I am looking for a man” (Diogenes Laertios 1984: 331). Centuries later, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Zamoyska echoed a similar sentiment, lamenting the “lack of people in society”: “Plenty of people are born, but though they have the human form, they lack the spirit that makes them, in the fullest sense of the word, the kind of people that the country and society need” (Zamoyska 2002: 11). She questioned the value of physical development, education, or material success if a person cannot use them wisely. Her answer was clear: education must be accompanied by upbringing—“the development of sound judgment, a vigilant conscience, a valiant will, and fortitude of soul” (Zamoyska 2002: 10).

According to Zamoyska, upbringing is the art of guiding souls; the most difficult art of all, because “no two souls are so alike that what applies to one can absolutely match the other” (Zamoyska 2002: 13). Thus, education has both a distant and a proximate goal. The distant goal, shared by all people, is eternal happiness. The proximate goal involves discovering one’s vocation and the talents needed to fulfill it. The role of upbringing is to nurture these talents while eliminating negative inclinations.

Fulfilling the goals of education, according to Zamoyska, requires obedience. This idea runs counter to modern attitudes, where obedience is often seen as a barrier to the development of reason and will. Obedience is typically understood as following rules and commands (Reber 2000: 525). A legitimate concern arises from the risk that rules and commands might be misinterpreted or misguided. This is especially true if obedience is mistaken for mere submission, where a person complies not because they understand or believe in what they’re doing, but simply because they feel compelled to do so (Reber 2000: 525). Zamoyska argued that “shaping” blind obedience in upbringing is unjustifiable:

People raised in this way do not know how to direct themselves. Just as actors, who, without learning their lines, cannot perform without a prompter, so too, children accustomed to passively following someone else’s will—always held on a tight leash, without forming their own principles and beliefs—succumb to various influences and, like moths to a flame, fall into the very dangers they were most conscientiously protected from for many years. (Zamoyska 2002: 20–21)

The fact is that upbringing initially requires obedience is justified by the child’s dependency and the need to protect their well-being. While a child has free will, making the right decisions depends on rational discernment. Although a child has reason, they lack the ability to fully judge what is true and good versus what is false and morally wrong. What is necessary is the gradual and regular development of the child’s reason and will, guided by teachers who create the optimal conditions for this growth. The teacher—often the parent as the child’s first educator—uses their wisdom to guide the child’s will. This eliminates the dangers of obedience associated with vague rules and commands, as in proper upbringing these are always aimed at the child’s welfare.

Thus, in the early stages of upbringing, obedience is required, but always with respect for the child's dignity. Over time, the focus shifts toward developing common sense, a moral character, and the desired independence. Obedience "strengthens the will, provides the power to control oneself and one's negative inclinations, the strength to restrain anger, overcome laziness, resist temptations, and fortitude to fulfill even the most difficult duties" (Zamoyska 2002: 20). Respecting a child's independence without allowing them to experience obedience is a misguided principle. "Even the most talented and well-endowed individuals, if they do not learn to adhere to clearly defined rules, even with good intentions can lose time, energy, and resources—ultimately to no benefit for themselves, society, or the country. (Zamoyska 2002: 20).

A well-known consequence of this misguided principle is that children may dominate adults with selfish demands, and later, as adults, may impose their will egocentrically in family and social settings—as spouses, coworkers, or supervisors. Zamoyska also pointed out another advantage: "Those who learn to obey without hesitation will later avoid the indecisiveness that is so harmful and so common now that people have stopped valuing obedience" (Zamoyska 2002: 19). She provides an example: children might argue with their parents over choosing a coat or shoes, "but when it comes to a decision that determines their vocation or entire future, they become as if powerless and thoughtless" (Zamoyska 2001: 128).

It seems that the erosion of the value of obedience continues today: it is not uncommon for young people to struggle with decisions about independence, forming lasting relationships, or taking on the responsibilities of parenthood. This indecisiveness can even extend to fundamental aspects of identity, such as one's gender. To make wise decisions, one needs sound reasoning and a steady will, both of which are gradually developed through skillful, decisive, and systematic educational guidance. In Zamoyska's view, obedience not only does not hinder the development of reason and will—it is essential to shaping them.

Radosław Mazur offers a useful comparison to understand the value of obedience. In both Hebrew and Greek, there is a close connection between the concepts of "to obey" and "to listen," leading Mazur to define obedience as "responding positively to what one hears and

affirming the call” (Mazur 2019: 284; cf. Kogler, Egger-Wenzel, Ernst 2011: 606). Paweł Pawlikowski describes this process as follows:

Listening demands much more than seeing, which instantly reveals the shape of things. Listening, however, is a gradual process of following the speaker’s thoughts, slowly bringing the listener closer to understanding the speaker’s intentions and will. True listening engages the entire person. While we may hear with our ears, comprehension comes through the mind, and acceptance or rejection of what is heard comes through the will. (Pawlikowski 2019: 270)

Understanding obedience, then, involves more than just following rules and commands designed for the good of both the individual and the community, it also requires considering the subjectivity behind obedience, meaning the personal motives and intentions that drive it. It reaches beyond mere outward compliance, and touches the depth of thoughts, reflections, and choices, as obedience stems from trust and a deliberate decision, shaped by the quality of the relationship with the person to whom it is directed. In Zamoyska’s view, cultivating obedience, given its crucial role in achieving educational goals, is an essential foundation for the upbringing process.

## The value of role models in education

Jadwiga Zamoyska believed that every person a child encounters, even briefly, bears significant responsibility. Whether a relative, friend, priest, doctor, visitor, or neighbor, each plays a role as a teacher: “One good example, one word of admonition, warning, or encouragement is sometimes enough to steer a youngster away from a bad path, guide them toward a good one, and ignite a noble desire for study and work, or a zeal for any worthy cause” (Zamoyska 2002: 23). Similarly, she warned: “One careless smile or a reckless word, one dismissive shrug, can undermine a child’s judgment and conscience, potentially causing great harm to their soul” (Zamoyska 2002: 23). Children are highly perceptive; they notice everything they see and hear, nothing escapes their attention, and these observations shape their thoughts, feelings, and will:

They observe what makes people happy, what they worry about; what people value and what they disparage; what they willingly spend money on and what they refrain from spending on; what makes someone

angry; what sparks anger or laughter—they observe how everyone behaves towards others, what is said to their face, and what is said behind their back. From all of this, a child’s concepts and principles are formed. (Zamoyska 2002: 23)

Zamoyska’s observations confirm the findings of modern developmental psychology that humans naturally have a tendency to observe and emulate certain models—a pattern evident in children, adolescents, and adults alike (Olubiński 2012: 9). Experienced educator Helena Izdebska notes that upbringing cannot be effective without the presence of positive role models (Izdebska 1990: 34).

In upbringing, it is important who the young person chooses to imitate. Empirical studies have shown that 41% of adolescents aged 12–14 are influenced by media role models (Wasylewicz 2016: 107). These figures—often idols and celebrities—become part of the daily lives of young people through the media, fostering a sense of closeness and a desire to emulate them. While they are often seen as authorities, they do not always embody values that are beneficial for education. In fact, they can pose a developmental risk, as they frequently operate outside the realms of truth, goodness, and moral beauty that are essential to true authority. Instead, these caricatures of authority figures often seek fame over the well-being of those who admire them.

This makes it crucial for teachers and educators to be aware of the environment in which a child is growing up and to actively work to ensure it is educationally sound. Zamoyska emphasized this responsibility: “Parents must be very careful not only in choosing those to whom they entrust their children but also in considering everyone with whom their children interact” (Zamoyska 2002: 23). While these words express the parental duty, there are ongoing efforts to limit parents’ rights to influence educational programs in kindergartens and schools (cf. [https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/forum/191360\\_0.html](https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/forum/191360_0.html) [dostęp: 8.08.2023]).

The quality of role models is fundamental to education. Of particular importance is whether, and to what extent, the teacher serves as a role model. As Zamoyska (2002: 23) aptly questions, “In the material world, no one can give what they do not possess. So, how could one possibly do so in the realm of the mind or spirit?” She argues that education will be fruitless if a parent or teacher attempts

to teach and demand virtues they do not practice themselves: “To teach truthfulness, diligence, decency, and kindness, one must embody these very qualities—being truthful, diligent, decent, and kind” (Zamoyska 2002: 22–23). This observation is logical and irrefutable, yet it poses challenges in educational practice. For instance, a teacher might silence a class by shouting, a parent might require a child to attend Mass while neglecting to do so themselves, or an educator who smokes might preach the harms of smoking. In such cases, the power of personal example often speaks louder than words. Zamoyska also pointed out the importance of sincerity in the educator’s actions. If an educator acts solely to set a good example without genuinely believing in the rightness of their actions, the effectiveness of their example is diminished: “Beautiful words can sometimes temporarily convince, lift spirits, cheer up, or even inspire beautiful deeds, but even the most eloquent teacher will soon lose their influence and appeal if their life does not follow the principles they preach.” (Zamoyska 2002: 22). While the effort to avoid poor upbringing is important, it lacks the power that Zamoyska eloquently describes as the “conditions of vitality” that underpin the true effectiveness of a role model. Therefore, it is essential to remember that education begins with the teacher’s self-improvement. The failure to effectively work with others often stems from a lack of work on oneself (cf. Zamoyska 2001: 125).

## Value of work

The formation of the mind and will is necessary for undertaking anything that involves understanding its essence, meaning, and requires good will, patience, and persistence. Zamoyska, known for her great diligence, instilled the belief in her family home that work is the ultimate expression and test of love for the Fatherland. As an adult, she acknowledged that all development and progress depend on work, and that life itself is work (cf. Zamoyska 2001: 23). Hence, the issue of work occupies an important place in her educational philosophy, evident in the preparation for and daily practice of work at the School of Domestic Work that she founded in 1882, to which she devoted 40 years of her life.

Zamoyska's concept of work is personalistic, which corresponds with her understanding of human worth. She believed that in educating for work, one must first uncover the subjective meaning and suitable method of work (cf. Sztaba 2015: 98). If work incites aversion, she attributed this primarily to the individual, then to the nature of the work itself (Zamoyska 2001: 25–26). Her approach to laziness as an aversion to work is interesting. She categorized it into physical, mental, and spiritual types, recognizing that greater aversion correlates with greater annoyance a person experiences at work. Correspondingly, she identified three types of work as the only effective means of overcoming laziness (Zamoyska 2001: 25). Thus, one can conclude that laziness contributes to the degradation of human development across various dimensions, while work serves as a vehicle for integral development.

The strength of Jadwiga Zamoyska's concept of work lies in her belief in the unity of three types of work. This approach is worth revisiting today, especially since we often see mental work valued more highly than physical labor, with physical workers sometimes spoken of disrespectfully as “proles.” At the same time, spiritual work seems to be increasingly neglected—as if knowledge alone should constitute the wisdom of a person. Over a century ago, Zamoyska argued that the value of each type of work can only be fully realized when they are united. Yet even in her time, she noted, “it would seem that both in education and in the entire social order, people take as a principle not the unity of the three kinds of work, but the disunity between them” (Zamoyska 2001: 24). Contempt for any type of work, she argued, reflects a low moral standard (*ibid.*: 32), while industriousness, even if limited to simply fulfilling one's duties well, is a cornerstone of society because:

there is no greater benevolent force than the moral power of an individual who fulfills their tasks in the right position, at the right time, and in the right way. This moral foundation underpins the worth of individuals, nobility and success in family life, and the flourishing of all institutions, associations, societies, and nations. (Zamoyska 2001: 125)

Work should lead to self-reliance and an increase in personal resources, as it enhances “the vitality of the nation and its right to exist” (Zamoyska 2001: 127–128). This is why it is so important in upbringing to learn not just to work, but how to work. It seems

that the art of properly structuring work within the broader context of human activity, and working out internal principles for work has been lost in the process of upbringing. Zamoyska believed that “to break out of passivity, to change the shape of social life, it is necessary to closely examine our collective approach to work.” She emphasized the importance of daily work, done in small, deliberate steps—not for show, but methodically, persistently, and consistently (Gondek 2005: 248). Thus, work has both individual and social dimensions. It is an existentially significant value, as through work, a person enhances their potential, expresses themselves, and connects with the world, including through love of their homeland.

Despite great technological advancements, the disappearance of certain professions and the emergence of new ones, the timeless principles articulated by Jadwiga Zamoyska regarding work remain relevant (Zamoyska 2001: 119). It is worthwhile to reflect on one’s awareness of these principles:

- Do not start with what you might end up with.
- Do not neglect what is urgent.
- Do not begin non-obligatory work if obligatory work remains unfinished.
- Attend to what is closer before addressing what is further away.
- Avoid tackling difficult and optional tasks before conscientiously fulfilling necessary and easier ones.
- Resist the temptation to prioritize generosity over justice.
- Do not dream about what could be done under better conditions, but focus on what needs to be done under current circumstances.
- Fulfill inherent duties before engaging in activities outside this scope.

These principles can be compared with contemporary sayings about work, such as:

- Work isn’t going anywhere.
- Whether one sits or lies down, payment for work is due.
- Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?
- Do the day after tomorrow what you have to do today, you’ll have two days off.
- Being cunning will get you promoted.

In Zamoyska's perspective, work is not merely a "commodity." It is essential to prepare oneself and the work environment thoroughly because all work is more successful when it is prepared with the worker's talents, appropriate time, place, manner, and tools necessary for this work" (Zamoyska 2001: 46). Her insights are both wise and practical, and oriented on ensuring that work is done efficiently with a sense of purpose and joy, rather than mere toil.

A person can have different attitudes toward work, ranging from seeing it as a necessity to embracing it as a way of serving others—moving from compulsion to love. Theologian and psychologist Marek Dziewiecki offers an insightful reflection:

Those who love little also work little. Conversely, those who try to work though they love no one, often do so for the wrong reasons, such as the pursuit of a career or money alone. Such people do not experience the joy of life. Instead, they may fall into work addiction (workaholism) or abandon work entirely, choosing to live off others. (Dziewiecki 2007: 7)

One can be satisfied with one's work to varying degrees, or even experience a lack of such satisfaction. One can fulfil oneself, one's plans and dreams to varying degrees through work, or experience a lack of self-fulfilment. One's attitude toward work is shaped by one's work-related preferences, among other things:

One can view work through the prism of economic benefits, forming an instrumental attitude, or through the prism of self-fulfilment, forming a subjective attitude. Through a certain attitude toward work, a person expresses his/her expectations of life, themselves and others, and reveals who he/she is or who he/she would like to be as a person and a member of the community. (Jazukiewicz 2017: 88)

Understanding the value and meaning of work should, therefore, be a crucial part of education. Zamoyska was aware of this when she developed a program of social work that emphasized two key dimensions: the individual and the national. On an individual level, she viewed the preparation for and experience of work as essential to achieving life goals, bringing a sense of purpose and joy. On a national level, she saw work as a means to combat certain societal flaws, and better serve the Fatherland. Zamoyska particularly stressed the need to address laziness, carelessness, and a lack of precision through education (Zamoyska 2001: 34). In both cases, she considered work to be

a difficult yet noble good, one that corresponds to and enhances the dignity of both the individual and the nation, expressing this dignity and multiplying it.

## The fruits of education and the essence of virtue

According to Zamoyska's perspective, the ultimate goal of upbringing should be virtues, as they are essential for achieving both immediate and long-term goals in the process of education. According to Zamoyska, inner virtues, or moral virtues form the basis of familial, social, and international relationships (Zamoyska 2002: 262). Therefore, their cultivation is of pivotal importance since they do not develop spontaneously. Virtues represent specific qualities that guide us towards moral excellence. They are subjective and reflect a person's reasoned judgment and their will to act accordingly. For virtue to occur, both aspects of human internal faculties—reason in discerning truth and goodness, and will in making decisions in accordance with such discernment—must be refined (cf. Jazukiewicz 2012: 168).

Zamoyska asserts that virtues should be instilled from an early age: "Children have the potential to cultivate nobility and spirituality if they are shielded from their animal instincts from an early age, and encouraged to develop a sense of personal dignity" (Zamoyska 2002: 263). The manifestation of virtue lies in morally upright actions, which underpins the author's belief that "All acts of theft, persecution, or murder are always caused by a deficiency in moral virtues" (Zamoyska 2002: 262). Creating conditions conducive to the formation of virtues in childhood entails ensuring that children, "prior to making any major decision, consider whether their intentions are prudent, just, temperate, and courageous" (Zamoyska 2002: 263). The primary virtues she identifies are prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. These virtues, articulated by Plato, are categorized in contemporary virtue theory as cardinal virtues, with temperance referred to as the virtue of moderation.

Prudence enables reason to discern the moral good accurately and to guide its realization, and motivates the will to adopt the right attitude (Jazukiewicz 2012: 95). It is synonymous with practical wisdom, as it involves applying learned truths in everyday actions. Zamoyska defines prudence as "choosing appropriate and decent

means for achieving the desired goal, while also anticipating the dangers that may await us” (Zamoyska 2002: 266). It serves as a principle of right action, since it makes it possible for us to identify the means necessary to achieve a goal in any given situation. Importantly, virtue always concerns decent goals and means.

Zamoyska believed that these goals and means should include teaching children to: (1) manage themselves prudently to avoid unnecessary risks and illnesses; (2) use things wisely and according to their purpose, e.g. respecting books, equipment, and clothing, and not wantonly destroying or wasting anything; (3) handle money prudently, avoiding unnecessary purchases, even if they are appealing or inexpensive—a principle especially relevant in today’s world of promotions and sales; prudence also involves not accumulating unnecessary items, especially if one does not have a proper place or use for them; (4) use speech prudently, knowing what to say, to whom, and how to speak, as well as when to remain silent; (5) manage time prudently; (6) exercise freedom judiciously; children should be carefully guided “until they have judgment, conscience, and will sufficiently developed to govern themselves” (Zamoyska 2002: 267), but “without creating oppressive conditions—instead, they should be taught prudent self-reliance; (7) choose friends carefully, recognizing that a good friend is a great gift, but poor choices in friends or acquaintances can lead to disastrous consequences as can trusting people whom one does not know well enough; prudence is even more important in making decisions related to marriage.

According to Zamoyska, wisdom necessary for prudence comes more naturally to those who are shy, selfish, or phlegmatic than to those who are self-reliant, generous, or zealous (Zamoyska 2002: 268). However, prudence is an acquired virtue that anyone, with good will, can develop. Zamoyska also offers a useful criterion for recognizing prudence in oneself: “If someone is unsure whether an act, move, or words are prudent, they should ask themselves what would happen if everyone behaved similarly” (Zamoyska 2002: 268). It is often a lack of prudence that causes people to feel easily offended: “A little reflection and prudence would be enough to see that criticism and reprimands shed light that might not otherwise be shed, and thus, one need not be indignant about them; instead, one should be grateful for them” (Zamoyska 2002: 269). Zamoyska acknowledges

that remarks or criticism can be exaggerated or unfair, but prudent people are those who can make proper use of them, as they are “grateful for what is said to them directly, rather than behind their back” (Zamoyska 2002: 269). This is because a prudent person does not get caught up in trivialities of little importance.

Gianfranco Ravasi, an Italian Catholic cardinal, observed that in modern thought, the virtue of prudence has been somewhat marginalized, “partly due to a style of behavior that trusts in impulses, disregards rules, focuses on freedom, and often ignores limits and boundaries” (Ravasi 2012: 41). Zamoyska’s educational views rehabilitate this lost virtue by refusing to separate theory from practice and by connecting the moral sphere not only to specific situations but, above all, to enduring values.

Justice is a concept that is simultaneously clear and complex, straightforward yet often misunderstood. As a virtue, it is sometimes considered “iron-clad” and marked by traits of severity (Ravasi 2012: 48, 54). This perception is probably due to the fact that the law is the guarantor of justice. A person upholds the law, grants it to others, and receives it in return. Justice not only acknowledges this reality but also involves an act of prudence through which the law becomes an actual decision (Kalinowski 2000: 96–97). According to Zamoyska, justice and prudence are closely connected:

Everything that applies to the one also applies to the other, with the difference, however, that prudence serves mainly to judge each matter and action in itself, while justice is to judge it in relation to other matters, actions, and circumstances. (Zamoyska 2002: 271)

While prudence involves deciding whether an action is appropriate and useful, justice evaluates whether it is possible to undertake the action while respecting others’ rights, fulfilling one’s obligations, and considering the available means (Zamoyska 2002: 271). Zamoyska’s understanding of justice centers on relationships. First, it involves fulfilling duties toward others and oneself. Families, institutions, and nations thrive when everyone, guided by principles of justice, conscientiously fulfills their obligations. This is crucial for accumulating the resources needed to remedy difficult and crisis situations, both individually and socially (cf. Zamoyska 2002: 270, 274). Second, the relational aspect of justice is evident in giving back to everyone

what is rightfully theirs. This perspective excludes the notion of justice as equal distribution. Zamoyska believed that the very nature of life precludes equality. Equality might apply to mechanical products, but humans, endowed with reason and will, should strive in their endeavors—whether in existence, property, respect, or position—according to the duties of their status, circumstances, and available means. Striving for or maintaining equality in this regard would lead to sameness, resulting in “slavish mediocrity” (Zamoyska 2002: 272). Wisdom, she suggested, involves “doing better and better what one should do” (Zamoyska 2002: 274). This insight from Zamoyska is especially relevant in today’s world, which often pushes people to constantly do more and more. A wise understanding of the virtue of justice requires recognizing that the fundamental pillar of justice is merciful love: “Embracing justice, love gives rise to mercy, while mercy reveals the very perfection of justice” (John Paul II, 1980). According to Zamoyska, justice without mercy is ruthless and can even turn into injustice. Similarly, mercy without justice becomes harmful, so it ceases to be true mercy (Zamoyska 2002: 272). Thus, separating justice from charity distorts both virtues. Zamoyska’s reflections on the mutual complementarity of love, mercy, and justice offer valuable insights. Modern civilization requires such an understanding of justice that finds its fulfilment in the virtue of love (Jazukiewicz 2012: 99). The gap between these virtues might be one reason for modern attempts to replace the civilization of love with barbarism.

Temperance, or moderation, is the virtue by which a person exercises self-control and applies the right measure to everything they do (Jazukiewicz 2012: 105). Zamoyska described this virtue as: “Temperance, or moderation, the right measure in all the activities of life, which produces the domination of reason and will ... over the senses” (Zamoyska 2002: 275). From this follows the significance and power of temperance, as it ensures harmony between the body and spirit, allowing the spirit to rightfully dominate over sensuality. For a temperate person, the pursuit of pleasure is not the determining criterion for making choices or guiding behavior in everyday life. Instead, decisions are shaped first by necessity, then by utility, and only lastly by what is pleasurable. This connection between temperance and prudence is crucial: without prudence, temperance would not be a rational virtue, as one would not be able to select the right pleasures

that contribute to their well-being without hindering the pursuit of objective good. Through temperance, the body and senses find their proper place within the whole of humanity, which is intimately tied to dignity. The value of moderation is not found in what it restricts but in what it offers (cf. Jazukiewicz 2012: 107–108). Its inherent goodness is not about “masochism, anorexia, or a tart and grim asceticism ...; it is a sign of serene detachment and inner dignity; ... when we violate the rules of temperance, we face not just a physiological issue, but moral degeneration” (Ravasi 2012: 68). Jadwiga Zamoyska contemplated the practical aspects of this understanding of human existence, pointing out the areas of daily life that require careful attention in education (Zamoyska 2002: 276–277):

1. Temperance in eating and drinking: This virtue contributes to mental fortitude, clarity of mind, and physical health, and helps avoid unnecessary expenditures, not only on excessive food and alcohol or other stimulants, but also on the consequences of such intemperance. A lack of temperance weakens a person’s spiritual, mental, and physical faculties, leading to family and social suffering. Educational reflection on this matter is particularly necessary today, as the modern Western world trends towards consumption and waste, while obesity is a significant problem, and other parts of the world suffer from hunger and thirst (cf. Ravasi 2012: 67).
2. Temperance in speech: Zamoyska aptly noted, “Speech, like water, the better tamed, the greater strength it possesses; spreading widely and shallowly, water creates a swamp, and speech creates talkativeness” (Zamoyska 2002: 276). The art of expressing oneself concisely is vital—to so as to avoid boring others, to so as not to obstruct agreement, so as not to waste time, so as not to gossip or spread confidential information. One should be cautious about assuming that others will keep confidential matters when one has not been careful about keeping quiet oneself; In situations of reprimand, “a prudent and firm word will do more than arguments repeated a dozen times” (Zamoyska 2002: 276).
3. Restraint in play: Children should be taught to end their play at a given time without bargaining, without shouting and anger, which helps them develop the self-control needed to

prioritize their future duties over social activities. This does not mean abandoning social duties but understanding legitimate preferences. Many people struggle to focus on work because “every opportunity to play, to visit, or to entertain guests presents itself to them as a duty, whether social or familial, that takes precedence over their state duties” (Zamoyska 2002: 276). For example, a woman might feel that she “does not have time” to care for children, manage a home, or educate herself (e.g., through a good book), because she is too busy planning and preparing entertainment, after which she paradoxically needs rest. A house perpetually full of guests creates a new duty: reciprocating visits, which is a sort of a “trap.” Intemperance in entertaining not only hinders the performance of duties but “actually makes it harder to fulfill them, because any task, like any work, becomes so much more difficult when it is done less conscientiously” (Zamoyska 2002: 277).

4. Temperance in work: A just measure in this regard means limiting work “to the hours set aside for work, and not stretching it beyond the hours needed for sleep and meals” (Zamoyska 2002: 277).
5. Restraint in generosity: Generosity must not turn into wastefulness; frugality should not become stinginess; strictness should not become sternness; and mercy should not become an incentive for abuse. As a matter of fact, according to Zamoyska, only love is beyond moderation, as love should be “without any limits,” although temperance is needed in expressing it so that love remains a virtue and not a passion (cf. Zamoyska 2002: 278).

Zamoyska believed that while prudence and justice can only be taught to children once they reach a certain level of mental development, temperance can and should be taught from birth (Zamoyska 2002: 275). Shaping this virtue is a paramount task, particularly for Poles, as the author considered temperance the most difficult moral virtue for them to master. This observation remains relevant today: “The lack of temperance itself could largely suffice explain our national disasters and the frequent personal failures so common among us” (Zamoyska 2002: 275).

Regrettably, it must be admitted that the task of learning temperance has not been fulfilled for over a century. The individual, family, and social tragedies associated with alcoholism and other intoxicants are just a few examples. If we consider that the moral virtue of moderation applies to a broad spectrum of behaviors (e.g., shame, decency, generosity, graciousness, modesty, and desires) and becomes “an arbiter in matters of sight, smell, hearing,” then we must also acknowledge the role of moderation in addressing issues like pride, arrogance, and abuse (Ravasi 2012: 70–71). This, in turn, implies a link between temperance and fortitude, which is not lacking in our nation.

The virtue of fortitude represents the strength of spirit needed to do good and endure the hardships that arise in achieving it. The essence of fortitude manifests itself primarily in consistently choosing truth and goodness in one’s actions, and in the ability to overcome obstacles in this pursuit. What is truly valuable is a person’s steadfast commitment to truth and goodness, whether through heroic acts in extraordinary circumstances or the quiet heroism of everyday life (cf. Jazukiewicz 2012: 104). Zamoyska’s educational thought emphasizes this everyday aspect of fortitude. She describes fortitude as “overcoming difficulties in fulfilling duties and enduring life’s hardships” (Zamoyska 2002: 278). While she acknowledges the valor of fortitude in battle, suffering, martyrdom, death, and persecution, traits that Poles already exhibit and do not need to be taught she believes that it is the less obvious aspects of fortitude that are most crucial.

Fortitude also involves perseverance, the sacrifice of self-love, setting aside personal concerns and the desire for popularity. Defending truth, faith, justice, and principles and beliefs, can lead to slander and persecution, not only from oppressors but, even more harshly, from one’s own people and loved ones. This deeper dimension of fortitude is something that should be taught. (Zamoyska 2002: 278)

It is difficult to admit, even to oneself, that one lacks the courage to pursue what is desired. It is not physical courage alone that is the issue. According to Zamoyska, while physical courage is a noble quality, it does not constitute a virtue on its own. Physical courage is largely influenced by natural predispositions, though it can and should be developed through physical exercise, which builds strength, dexterity, and health. It also helps instill boldness, temper selfishness,

awaken a sense of dignity, and cultivate self-control (Zamoyska 2002: 278–279). However, true fortitude requires moral courage, which stems from “a love of truth and justice; sometimes we need it greatly to stand firm in our principles and convictions, even when it means facing criticism, mockery, or persecution in defense of truth and justice. It involves rising above merely personal or immediate concerns to uphold these values. (Zamoyska 2002: 279). A practical way to understand the importance of this virtue is to consider the consequences of lacking it. Fear of being labeled timid, selfish, or stingy can lead people to engage in reckless or imprudent or even erratic behavior. A lack of perseverance can cause individuals to abandon their commitments, impacting others who depend on them. Many individual and national disasters stem from weak principles, a lack of courage to uphold convictions, and inconsistent follow-through on decisions. The source of fortitude is love: “Love of truth and justice can overcome selfish timidity and pettiness” (Zamoyska 2002: 279). While fortitude is a personal virtue, it also has a social dimension, contributing to a better future (cf. Zamoyska 2002: 280). This belief is echoed by contemporary thinkers:

We live in a world where structures and situations of injustice, economic inequality, and domination are increasingly prevalent. Therefore, fortitude must be directed towards resolving these issues plaguing the lives of citizens on both national and global levels. (Ravasi 2012: 60)

Zamoyska framed the outcomes of comprehensive education within the context of virtue. This perspective led her to investigate how moral goodness shapes one’s way of being, as part of a broader search for the purpose and meaning of education and life itself. Her focus was on human happiness, self-improvement, and the quality of relationships with others and oneself. Moral virtues, according to Zamoyska, improve an individual’s ability to lead a responsible, self-reliant and fulfilling life. Her message emphasizes the importance of the everyday aspects of life and the quality of fulfilling one’s civic duties. These virtues constitute a person’s strength in fulfilling one’s potential, managing one’s personal development and contributing to societal well-being. Zamoyska’s approach to education reflects a deep wisdom and remains relevant across time.

## The value of the relationship between upbringing and religion

Zamoyska's ideas offer a coherent program of Catholic education. Her approach is based on universal values that transcend individual worldviews and historical periods. To fully understand her perspective, it is essential to explore the religious premises embedded in Zamoyska's views on upbringing. This connection between upbringing and Catholicism remains significant for contemporary audiences. Maria Gondek has articulated this relevance as follows:

The program of Catholic education and upbringing presented by Zamoyska stands as a precise counter to the atheistic agendas prevalent in schools today and the contemporary trends dominating school curricula. These trends, which sometimes even affect Catholic institutions, liberalize the educational process to an extent that has led, on the scale of entire societies, to widespread pedagogical failures. These failures have resulted in the erosion of the authority of educators and disruption of the educational system. The misguided "freedom" granted to students which is based on social ignorance and divorced from the pursuit of goodness—has been fueled by popular notions of spontaneity and naturalness. This has led to a blind "love" from parents and educators, causing many children harm that is often irreparable in adulthood. (Gondek 2002: 7)

Zamoyska viewed life and education through the lens of eternity, seeing personal growth as intertwined with religious maturity. Below are examples of how religious principles are integrated into her educational philosophy, organized according to the topics discussed in this article.

1. The complexity of everyday life requires comprehensive development. Zamoyska notes: "How many people, under the pressure of various circumstances, rush through life day by day, unaware of their direction or purpose. It is no wonder that, in this pursuit, they blindly fall into the abyss" (Zamoyska 2002: 11). The contradictions within human nature—noble impulses and moral failures, wicked falls, angelic highs and base instincts, strengths and weaknesses—are difficult to explain. Zamoyska's perspective is religious: "Human beings are created in the likeness of God and, at the same time, are unfortunate heirs of original sin" (Zamoyska 2002: 11). Hence, education and upbringing are essential.

2. Upbringing is a deliberate process guided by specific principles. According to Zamoyska, the source and justification for these goals and principles are religious: “Therefore, if we wish to educate a person, where should we turn for guidance on their being, purpose, and the laws governing them, if not to God who created them and established their purpose and laws?” (Zamoyska 2002: 11).
3. Upbringing has both distant and immediate goals. The distant goal, which unites all people, has a transcendent dimension: eternal life (cf. Zamoyska 2002: 27). The immediate goal is individual and concerns the fulfillment of a vocation: “God gives each person talents according to His calling, so, alongside the overall goal, upbringing should take into account these individual tasks” (Zamoyska 2002: 13). Children’s abilities reflect God’s will, so the task of educators is to recognize these abilities and create conditions for their growth. Parents are of particular importance in this process, as Zamoyska “holds them accountable” to God, stating: “Parents are neither masters nor creators of their children; they should nurture God-given abilities but cannot create them. Insisting on educating children in areas for which they are not gifted can lead to neglect of other important gifts, which parents will have to account for before God” (Zamoyska 2002: 13).
4. Upbringing requires obedience. Zamoyska justifies this need with a religious perspective: “When God created the first people, first He demanded absolute obedience without explaining why He forbade them from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Later, Christ, while teaching by word and example, spoke to His disciples at their level. Similarly, the Church gradually proclaims its doctrines and teachings in line with societal development and maturity” (Zamoyska 2002: 15). Through obedience—understood as listening and responding to divine guidance—one can fulfill God’s will according to their vocation. Mature obedience is marked by an orientation towards the kingdom of God (Pawlikowski 2019: 277).
5. It is the duty of the teacher to set an example of what qualities they expect from their students. Zamoyska supported this idea

- with a religious comparison, quoting St. Paul: “Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (Zamoyska 2002: 21).
6. Work has a religious dimension. It is an atonement for sins and a condition for salvation. Zamoyska wrote: “Subdue the earth, said God to our first parents, giving them the earth to possess; but how could they possess it without some degree of labor, even if only to gather its crops?” (Zamoyska 2001: 23). She identifies three types of labour and cites their religious justification: “Christ, in Nazareth, worked by hand at the parental workshop; in the temple, He engaged in intellectual work through study and teaching; He also worked spiritually by praying, suffering, fasting, and battling Satan. He left us these three forms of work as examples” (Zamoyska 2001: 24). The Catholic dimension of Zamoyska’s concept of education through work was affirmed by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X in letters addressed to her. According to theologian Mariusz Sztaba, Zamoyska’s understanding of work not only enriched the Catholic tradition but also anticipated contemporary Catholic thought on work, as presented by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Laborem exercens* (Sztaba 2015: 97).
  7. Virtues should be the fruits of education. Virtue arises from the collaboration between human will and God’s grace: “Neither divine grace without human will, nor human will without divine grace will produce virtue” (Zamoyska 2002: 261). The three divine virtues form “the infallible basis of all moral principles and social order. How can we discuss the fruits of upbringing without mentioning these three powerful virtues, which are not only the basis, but also the culmination of education?” (Zamoyska 2002: 264).
  8. Zamoyska identified religious sources as the foundation of educational reflection. Particularly valuable is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In this source, anyone can find answers to existential dilemmas: “Where do we come from? Where are we destined to go? What must we fulfill on earth, and what awaits us after death?” (Zamoyska 2002: 11). Drawing principles for life and upbringing from the catechism, she notes, “We go to the treasury of wisdom for wisdom, to omnipotence for power; as Christ promised, we find what we seek,

we receive what we ask for; in the catechism ... the whole matter of upbringing is presented to us in the right light” (Zamoyska 2002: 13). Even the structure of Zamoyska’s work, *O Wychowaniu* [On Education], mirrors that of the catechism. Aware that the catechism—being a summary of the truths and principles of faith found in Scripture—contains abstract concepts, Zamoyska recommends children and young people turn to the examples of life provided in the Scripture.

Holistic human development includes the spiritual dimension, that is, the inner space that can be filled with the love of God. The program of Catholic upbringing consciously forms the identity of a Christian, person who, by serving God, their homeland, and others, and by discovering and fulfilling their earthly vocation, attains both temporal and eternal happiness. This program leaves no room for laziness or discouragement; instead, it celebrates work, joy, and hope. In encountering God, a person receives more love than they deserve and learns to bestow it on others. Every person needs love; without it, there is no life or development.

## Conclusion

Jadwiga Zamoyska lived and worked during a time when the country was under foreign oppression. The School of Domestic Work was established during the Prussian partition, and its emphasis on patriotic education was strongly resisted by the Prussians. This persecution forced Zamoyska to leave Kórnik and frequently relocate. Despite these challenges, she never wavered, surrendered, or lost faith in the importance of education and upbringing. She believed it was vital, especially for when independence would be regained. Her foresight proved correct. Once independence was restored, the country needed a wise and educated populace, so she developed a program of individual and social work. She stressed the importance of self-improvement, combating national vices, and contrasting diligence with laziness, conscientiousness with sloppiness, honesty with dishonesty, and perseverance with carelessness. Zamoyska’s philosophy suggests that patriotism is not only about grand gestures but also about the everyday heroism of faithfulness and conscientiousness. Such an attitude is shaped in the process of upbringing. This understanding of

sacrificial love for one's homeland and its values is detailed in her work, *O miłości ojczyzny* [On the Love of the Homeland] (2021).

The message of Jadwiga Zamoyska remains relevant and necessary. Individual shortcomings, when compounded, can weaken a nation. Personal efforts to develop virtues, methodically pursued through upbringing and education, contribute to the nation's strength. For Zamoyska, personal work is not a burdensome task but a joyful endeavor; obedience is not about submission but about gaining independence; and respect for moral principles is not a mere duty but a path to wisdom. Her educational philosophy is not a list of prohibitions but a positive guide to living a life filled with love, responsibility, truth, and freedom, including the freedom of God's children. The goal of education is to cultivate mature love for God, one's homeland, life, and people. Zamoyska also assigned a significant role to women in society. She believed that a woman's moral character profoundly impacts the social and national moral integrity. As she wrote, "irrespective of the great responsibilities of a husband, father, master of the house head of the household, if he does wrong by his shameful behavior, how much more terrible is the social harm inflicted on a woman when she strays from virtue, when she deviates from the right path, and neglects her duties as a wife, mother, and mistress of the house" (Zamoyska 2002: 351). She further noted, "A man, despite some mistakes, can sometimes bring considerable benefits to society, but a woman, when she lacks her virtues, humiliates herself and her household ..., does terrible harm to her nation" (Zamoyska 2002: 351). The conclusion is clear: "What moral value of a woman, ... such is the moral integrity of the society and the nation" (Zamoyska 2002: 351). Zamoyska attributed significant power, honor, and responsibility to women. In today's era of various social movements, it is worth reflecting on the value of female dignity. Zamoyska not only promoted her beliefs but also demonstrated them through her actions. She was renowned for her diligence and perseverance in advancing educational and social causes for her country. She remains a model of wisdom and dedication, and her example can inspire and guide one through daily life.

On one side of Poland, we are facing a military war, while on the other, we are grappling with a moral one. The former is instigated by criminals, and the latter by so-called "engineers of this world" who

aim to normalize what is abnormal. In this challenging context, Zamoyska's educational program offers a blueprint for living a normal and happy life, both individually and as a nation. Some of Zamoyska's ideas, presented at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, remain self-evident today. If we feel we already know these values, it is worth asking why they still await fulfillment. At a convention of the women of Kuźnice (Kuźniczanki) on June 14–15, 1931, in Poznań, Poland's Primate August Hlond spoke poignant words about Jadwiga Zamoyska: "It is a pity that she is so little known and her teachings so little promoted" (Bross 1937: 8). To what extent have we, as Poles, made up for this "national loss"?

Jadwiga Zamoyska has been named a patron saint of 2023 in Poland. This recognition spotlights her as a role model for every Pole, and her ideas and social contributions are relevant to all, including non-believers, despite her authorship of a Catholic education program. Zamoyska exemplifies a life lived with integrity, and her educational philosophy centers on the fulfillment of humanistic values—attitudes essential for any nation that cares about its past, present, and future.

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# Janusz Korczak's Ancestors and the Image of Family in His Poem *Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray*

## ABSTRACT

The article shows the structure and the semantics of the religious text *Alone with God: The Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray*, written by Janusz Korczak, a well-known pedagogue. Korczak's lively interest in the topic of human spirituality is apparent in this text. In the "Dedication" in the final part of the collection of prayers, the author writes that they are the statements of his ancestors, dictated by his parents. By writing this, he expresses his conviction about the overwhelming importance of the heritage of the past to the spiritual development of each person. The article also contains a description of Korczak's ancestors and the image of the family recorded in the text.

## KEYWORDS

Janusz Korczak,  
educator, family, text  
semantics, religious  
language

## Introduction

Henryk Goldszmit (1878?–1942), better known by his pseudonym Janusz Korczak, was an outstanding theoretician and practitioner of pedagogy, an innovative writer, and creator of a modern educational system. He also pioneered a new model of children's

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magazines. As an author, Korczak is best known for his children's books, such as *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* [King Matt the First]), which continue to be widely read today, as well as his pedagogical treatises (e.g., *Jak kochać dziecko* [How to Love a Child]). In addition to these, his body of work includes pedagogical articles, journalistic pieces, letters, and a diary written during his time in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>1</sup> These writings have been the subject of numerous studies in the fields of pedagogy, literature, linguistics, sociology, and beyond.

### Subject of analysis, purpose, and research method

This article explores the structure and semantics of one of Janusz Korczak's most unique and lesser-known works: *Sam na sam z Bogiem. Modlitwy tych, którzy się nie modlą* [Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray]. In this text, Korczak's keen interest in spiritual matters, as well as the significance of family in human life<sup>2</sup> is particularly evident. First published in 1922 as a 71-page standalone work, this collection of prayers by the eminent educator has seen multiple reprints after World War II (Korczak 1993b; 1994; 2005a; 2005b) by various publishers. In 2018, it was republished by the Children's Ombudsman, Marek Michalak, with a thoughtful afterword by Jan Twardowski (based on the 1993 edition: Korczak, 1993b).

The purpose of this article is to examine the structure and semantics of Korczak's work, with a particular focus on how the family is portrayed in one of his most personal texts, analyzed against the backdrop of his own family origins. The research method employed is semantic analysis.

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1 As part of a comprehensive critical edition, 15 volumes of Korczak's works were published between 1992 and 2021. The editorial committee for these volumes includes Hanna Kirchner, Marta Ciesielska, and the late Aleksander Lewin and Stefan Wołoszyn. A supplement and indexes are currently in preparation.

2 Korczak's religiosity has been the subject of previous analyses, such as those by Furmański (1993) and Gretkowski (2017).

## Structure of the article

The work under analysis consists of an introductory text composed of five sentences, 18 prayers, and a dedication. Korczak's prayers are short; the longest, "The Artist's Prayer," spans six pages in a small-format booklet (10 × 14 cm). Four prayers occupy five pages each, one prayer covers four pages, eight prayers fill three pages each, and three others take up two pages each. The shortest prayer, "The Second Prayer of a Mother," is contained within a single page.

The title, *Alone with God*, refers to the fundamental nature of prayer as a personal encounter between the individual and God. The subtitle, *Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray*, is particularly intriguing. As Piotr Matywiecki explains, the essence of this subtitle lies in:

the paradox of a prayer expressed in non-prayer, in the thoughts of someone who does not pray. For each of the book's protagonists, prayer is something out of the ordinary, having nothing to do with a mere religious routine, and much to do with a sincere, unexpected decision made before of God. These prayers are offerings of their own sincerity, moments where people painfully shed their masks. (Matywiecki 2010: 79)

The contradiction in the subtitle serves as an invitation to both read and pray addressed to all those who are searching for God, and who feel that somewhere in the spiritual realm, there exists a being more powerful than themselves—someone to whom they can always turn in moments of happiness, joy, loneliness, abandonment, uncertainty, or terror.

## Semantics of the text

Korczak's prayers are compelling examples of personal, introspective poems that transcend the conventions of any religion. These prayers are voiced by fictional characters, crafted by Korczak, a 44-year-old bachelor who had lost his beloved mother two years earlier. At the time of writing, Korczak was an educator who had dedicated years to caring for Jewish and Polish orphans at the "Orphans' Home" in Warsaw and "Our Home" in Pruszków. He was also a doctor, a widely-read writer, and a journalist. In this work, he takes on the ambitious task of creating prayers that are uttered spoken by a variety of imagined individuals.

The titles of the prayers in this unique collection reflect the diverse voices of those praying: “Prayer of a Mother (1),” “Prayer of a Mother (2),” “Prayer of a Young Child,” “Prayer of a Girl,” “Prayer of a Boy,” “Prayer of an Old Man,” “Prayer of a Poor Man,” “Prayer of a Scholar,” “Prayer of an Artist,” and “Prayer of a Reckless Woman.” Some prayers do not specify a particular character, but through the masculine forms used in the text, it is clear that the speaker is a young man or an adult male. The titles of these prayers, such as “Prayer of Sorrow,” “Prayer of Impotence,” “Prayer of Complaint,” “Prayer of Reflection,” “Prayer of Rebellion,” “Prayer of Reconciliation,” and “Prayer of Joy,” hint at their themes and emotional tones. In “Prayer of Gaiety,” for instance, the speaker is a young girl: “And I wander, I don’t understand, and I try to guess myself, like a charade, like a very difficult algebraic task. To think that I am not what adults and peers think I am, is a folly; but after all, I am not what I think myself to be” (Korczak 1922: 49).<sup>3</sup>

Matywiecki (2010: 78) offers a thoughtful reflection on the choir of prayers in *Alone with God*:

Korczak’s prayer book captures the voices of people with diverse experiences and inner contradictions—people torn by emotions and moral dilemmas. Yet, it also represents a “harmony in one voice,” reflecting the author’s hidden voice within these prayers. What kind of imagination does it take to envision someone else’s prayer? Or perhaps, to discover within oneself the prayers of all? Or, perhaps: to pray “from oneself” to pray “with oneself,” and to find in oneself the prayers of everyone else? Perhaps in prayer alone, one can be truly oneself and yet also encompass everyone else. It seems that a prayerful attitude bestows upon a person the gift of empathy, the ability to enter into the personality of others. This empathic capacity is prayer’s most beautiful grace: reaching towards God from one’s depths, and in doing so, finding connection with others.

The prayers in this work are addressed to the One God—a transcendent, spiritual, supreme being represented by a multitude of names and terms, each carrying varied meanings. The term *Bóg* [God] appears most frequently in the text, about 100 times. Additionally, the diminutive form *Bozia* [God] is used a few times (pp. 16, 23—twice each, p. 24—twice).

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<sup>3</sup> The examples I reference from Korczak’s work are based on the first edition: Korczak (1922).

The names and terms used by Korczak to refer to the One God are rich in semantic complexity and can be categorized into several groups of meanings:

#### GOD'S GREATNESS, HIS POWER AND IMMORTALITY

*His Majesty God Our Lord* (p. 19—2 times, p. 20, p. 21), *His Majesty* (p. 19, p. 20, p. 22), *His Majesty God* (p. 22), *Mighty God* (p. 29), *Almighty* (p. 30—2 times), *Almighty God* (p. 28), *Mighty, Great, Immortal* (p. 20), *Great, Mighty, Immortal* (p. 50), *Omnipotent God* (p. 42), *God Omnipotent* (p. 42, p. 43, p. 44, cf. also *The One Almighty*, p. 43), *Your Omnipotence* (p. 44), *Our God and Lord* (p. 53, p. 54), *God and Lord* (p. 53, p. 55), *Lord* (p. 19—2 times, p. 47, p. 55), *Lord* (p. 61), *Grey Lord of the Silent World, God* (p. 18)

#### SECRET

*The Greatest Mystery—God* (p. 8), *God, the Mystery of Mysteries* (p. 56), *the Holy Proto-secret* (p. 60)

#### CREATION

*Creator* (p. 62—2 times, p. 63—2 times, p. 64, p. 66—2 times, p. 67)

#### GOODNESS

*Good* (p. 11), *Good God* (p. 11—2 times), *Good, Golden God* (p. 10), *Good, Beloved God* (p. 12; p. 14)

#### JUSTICE

*Lord God, Righteous Judge* (p. 39—2 times), *Righteous God* (p. 40), *Virtuous Judge* (p. 41), *God, the Righteous Judge* (p. 41)

#### LIGHT

*Radiant God* (p. 45), *Beaming God* (p. 45), *Sun* (p. 46), *God's Sun* (p. 46)

In *Alone with God*, the names and terms Korczak uses for the One God emphasize God's greatness, power, immortality, role as Creator, goodness, and justice—qualities typically attributed to God by Judeo-Christian believers. These include traditional names like "Father" (p. 34—2 times, p. 35—2 times, p. 46) and "Our Father"

(p. 31, p. 35). Korczak also uses affectionate terms like “Beloved God” (p. 12), “Good, Beloved God” (p. 12; p. 14), and “Beloved, Most Beloved God” (p. 52). His conceptualization of God as a loving being is further expressed in the phrase: “You are our family, common room, homeland, willingness and reward, ally of the initiated ones” (p. 60).

Additionally, Korczak uses more unusual terms, such as “Old Man” (p. 12), “Poor Grandpa” (p. 15), and “Brother” (p. 46). Given the article’s focus on family, these kinship related terms for God demand special attention. These include such names of the Supreme Being as Father (p. 34—2 times, p. 35—2 times, p. 46), “Our Father” (p. 31, p. 35), “Brother” (p. 46), and family (cf. “You are our family” [p. 60]), which were cited earlier.

Besides these, the text also features spiritual beings other than God, such as the “Angel of Sorrow” (p. 26) and “Satan” (p. 15). As in other prayers, Korczak’s work includes a substantial number of pronominal references to God, such as “You” and “Your.”

The author dedicated this work to his late parents, Cecylia and Józef Goldszmit, whom he lovingly refers to as Matus (Mommy) and Ojczulek (Papa).

Mommy—Papa. You dictated these prayers to me in a rush, and I had to painstakingly, from memory—word by word, letter by letter—piece them together and write them down. Sometimes I couldn’t hear you clearly, often I didn’t understand, and I made mistakes. My memory failed me, and I forgot so much. You rarely corrected me, just enough to make things clearer for both me and others. I’m not sure if I can call this my tombstone for you. I thank you for your life and death, and for my own life and death. We parted for a while, only to meet again.

Mommy—Papa, from all the deep longings and pains of you and our ancestors, I want to build a tall, soaring, solitary tower for people. The number of those silent voices I speak on your behalf, the voices of our ancestors, goes back three hundred years: as many as one thousand and twenty-four souls. They bore so many different names, which is why I don’t put any name on this small tombstone. Thank you for teaching me to hear the whispers of the dead and the living. Thank you for letting me understand the mystery of Life in the beautiful hour of death. Your Son.” (pp. 69–70)

In the “Dedication” included in *Alone with God*, the great pedagogue expresses his deep belief in the profound importance of one’s heritage and the legacy of the past; the great role of ancestors in the

physical, mental, and spiritual development of an individual. Matywiecki describes this dedication as “thrilling.”

Korczak portrays his deceased parents as the ones who dictated the prayers of various individuals to him. He suggests that these parents represent all praying people, embodying a kind of metaphysical motherhood and fatherhood. Korczak, as their son, speaks both from the perspective of someone living after their death and from a post-mortal viewpoint shared with them. He thanks his parents for both their lives and their deaths, including his own. I know of no more beautifully expressed communion with the Dead. (Matywiecki 2010: 85)

Korczak often explored the theme of generational continuity and its significance in his work. For example, in *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie* [How to Love a Child: The Child in the Family], he wrote:

You say: “my child.” No, it is a common child of mother and father, of grandparents and great-grandparents. It is someone’s distant self that slept among ancestors; suddenly, the voice of a long-forgotten past speaks through your child. Three hundred years ago, amid war and peace, someone was taken by someone else in a kaleidoscope of intersecting races, nations, classes—through consent or violence, in moments of terror or affection—betrayed or seduced, who knows? But God has recorded these events in the book of destiny; the anthropologist tries to infer them from skull shapes and hair color. Sometimes a sensitive child imagines they are a foundling in their parents’ home. This happens: their parent died before their time. The child is like a parchment covered with tiny hieroglyphs—some of which you manage to read, some you can wipe out or circle, and fill with your own meaning. It’s a harsh law, yet a beautiful one. It provides each child with the first link in the immortal chain of generations. Look for your own particle in that of someone else’s child. You might notice it, and perhaps you will even help it grow. (Korczak 1929: 10–11)

Korczak also pondered why exceptional people sometimes emerge from seemingly ordinary families. In his 1901 article “Geniuses,” he noted:

Each family, through gradual improvement, strives to produce genius, which is, as it were, the blossom of the entire nation’s efforts. I believe that each family works to produce a brilliant person, that each member contributes their spiritual particle to this goal. Each of our great-great-grandparents contributed to this process with their own spiritual savings. (Wołoszyn 1993: 514)

Korczak also discusses the significance of family heritage in his introduction to Jędrzej Śniadecki's dissertation "On the physical education of children":

degeneration, regeneration, and progeneration raise questions about families, nations, and humanity. Why do the few among the many (the great ones) emerge, surpassing others, leading the way and dragging along the passive masses of their contemporaries? ... How often, quietly and carelessly, we speak of parents and grandparents as though their collective efforts did not endow unique value or achieve a noteworthy form. Let it be known how many generations silently and laboriously gather their sap in the shadows before finally blossoming as the family's flower. Let every peasant, laborer, worker, artisan, and humble individual understand that with their child aiming toward the future, they hold the power to shape destiny. (Korczak 2017: 11–13)

Alexander Levin (1999: 108) notes that research into Dr. Goldszmit's ancestry shows the social, journalistic, and literary talents of his ancestors, which significantly influenced the great pedagogue's interests, aspirations and actions. Korczak recognized his debt to his ancestors and expressed this appreciation in his literary works. For example, in *Confessions of a Butterfly*, the boundary between literary fiction and the author's personal life is notably blurred. Korczak also reflected on his family and personal thoughts in his *Diary*, written from May to August 4, 1942, in the Warsaw ghetto, just before his deportation to Treblinka (Korczak 2021b).

### Korczak's ancestors: the Goldszmit and Gębicki families<sup>4</sup>

Korczak identified himself as both Jewish and Polish, a dual identity he often expressed in his writings. One of the most frequently quoted testimonies on this comes from a letter he wrote to Mieczysław Żylbertal on March 30, 1937:

I remember deciding not to start a family. How solemn and naïve it was. I was in a garden city near London: "A slave has no right to have

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers who have studied Korczak's ancestry and written about his family include Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa (1966), Maria Falkowska (1989), Joanna Olczak-Ronikier (2002), Maria Czapska (2006), and Bożena Wojnowska and Marlena Sęczek (see Goldszmit, Goldszmit 2017). These studies provide general information about his family background.

children: a Polish Jew under the Russian partition.” And immediately afterward, I felt as if I had committed suicide. (Korczak 2008: 213)

In her recent book, *Inna twarz Korczaka. Szkice o dwoistej tożsamości (i nie tylko)* [The Other Face of Korczak: Sketches on Dual Identity (and More)], Bożena Wojnowska offers a compelling exploration of Korczak as a figure deeply rooted in both Jewish and Polish cultures. Wojnowska fills a significant gap in the research on Henryk Goldszmit—better known as Janusz Korczak—by proposing that Korczak’s life represents a parallel between two cultural models: the Polish intelligentsia, which he revered from his youth, and the reforming Jew, shaped by the emancipatory aspirations of the post-Enlightenment Haskalah movement (Wojnowska 2023: 7).

Korczak’s Jewish ancestry on his father’s side traces back to Hrubieszów. During a conversation with Maria Czapska (2006: 53), Korczak shared that the most distant ancestors he knew of were homeless orphans who married in a Jewish cemetery as an act of propitiation during an epidemic in the ghetto. Writing about his Hrubieszów ancestor in his *Diary*, Korczak noted: “My great-grandfather was a glassmaker. I am glad: glass gives us warmth and light” (Korczak 2021b: 287). His paternal grandfather, Hersz (Hirsz), was a surgeon practicing in Hrubieszów, and his father, Józef, became a well-known lawyer in Warsaw. Korczak wrote of his father: “I should devote a lot of space to my father: I am fulfilling in my life what he pursued, and what my grandfather so painfully pursued for so many years” (Korczak 2021b: 287). Joanna Olczak-Ronikier also sheds light on Korczak’s family heritage:

He did not recount his grandfather’s struggles. These were not the kind of heroic hardships or sacrifices that one would proudly share. Jews who managed to escape the ghetto had to endure so many insults and humiliations—from both fellow Jews and Poles—that there were not enough words to capture it. Therefore, not much is known about these experiences. Or perhaps he was simply too private and modest to share a story that unfolded on the fringes of such dramatic events? (Olczak-Ronikier 2011: 27)

According to Maria Falkowska (1989: 25–26), Korczak’s grandfather, Hersz (Hirsz) Goldszmit, was a physician and an active social and educational activist in Hrubieszów. An ardent supporter of the Jewish Enlightenment, known as Haskalah, he ensured that his

children received education in Polish schools while maintaining the Jewish faith of his ancestors. A generous philanthropist, Hersz contributed financially to the construction of a synagogue in his hometown and raised funds for the Jewish Hospital where he worked. Little is known about Korczak's grandmother on his father's side, Chana (or Anna) Goldszmit, née Rajs. However, it is noteworthy that Korczak's father, Józef, dedicated his first book to "The shadows of Anna Goldszmit's most beloved and best mother ... as a token of his deepest reverence and affection" (Falkowska 1989: 26).

In 1866, Józef Goldszmit (1844–1896), Korczak's father and one of Hersz and Anna's sons, moved to Warsaw to study at the Warsaw Central School in the Faculty of Law and Administration. In a memoir published in the weekly newspaper *Izraelita* [Israelite], which was printed in Polish, he recounted his early experiences in the capital city:

For anyone who has been away from their parents, relatives, and friends for an extended time—especially for the first time, who has left his family home where he spent his most pleasant years, will easily understand how I felt, having suddenly found myself alone in a crowded capital, a stranger, separated from everyone I love and who loves me. With these thoughts, I approached the Throne of the Most High, seeking to unite with those I had left behind in prayer. I went to the synagogue on Daniłowiczowska Street. It is difficult for me to describe the impression it made on me, being in this beautiful Tabernacle of the Glory of God .... Soon, beautiful and melodious singing sounded. That supplication prayer held an unspeakable charm for me (Goldszmit 1866, qtd. in Olczak-Ronikier 2011: 37–38).

During his studies, Korczak's father focused on organizing secular elementary schools for Jewish boys, with instruction in Jewish religion and the Polish language, to replace the existing cheder schools, which were disconnected from Polish culture and knowledge. He believed strongly in popularizing the achievements of outstanding Jews in various branches of science. In 1870, he earned his master's degree in law and administration with a thesis titled "Lecture on Divorce Law under the Mosaic-Talmudic Laws, with a General View of Their Development with Consideration of the Laws in Force," which was highly praised and published the following year.

In 2017, Bożena Wojnowska, with the collaboration of Marlena Sęczek, republished texts by Józef Goldszmit and his brother

Jakub Goldszmit. In the introduction to this collection, it is noted that “they treated writing as a civic act; likewise, their involvement in Jewish education. In both cases, they were responding to the needs of the Warsaw heirs of the Haskalah” (Wojnowska 2017: 7).

Anna Goldszmit (later Lui after marriage) was Korczak’s elder sister, a sworn translator proficient in English, French, German, Russian, and Italian. Following the death of her husband, Józef Lui, she returned from Paris and moved in with her brother. In one of his wartime letters, Korczak fondly wrote about her:

My sister, the only and last relic of my childhood—a memory. She is the only one left on earth who calls me by my name. She . . . is a meticulous official, always willing to sacrifice personal gain for the greater good (Letter to Abraham Gepner, March 25, 1942). (Korczak 2021a: 120)

In articles discussing Korczak’s Jewish ancestors from his mother Cecylia Goldszmit, née Gębicka’s family, we find less information compared to the Goldszmit lineage. Korczak’s great-grandfather, Maurycy Gębicki (born 1780), was a surgeon, as was his grandfather. His maternal grandfather, Józef Adolf Gębicki (born 1826), was a respected merchant in Kalisz known for his professional, philanthropic, and social activities. Mina (Emilia) Gębicka, née Dajtscher, Korczak’s grandmother, was deeply religious and dedicated to her family and to the local community.

The pedagogue’s mother, Cecylia Goldszmit, née Gębicka (1857–1920), operated a student boarding house from her apartment after her husband’s death. Upon her son’s employment as a doctor in 1905, she moved in with him and managed their household. In 1920, during a typhus epidemic in Warsaw, Korczak was sent to the epidemiological hospital in Kamionki, where he contracted the disease. His mother took her unconscious son home and nursed him through his illness but also succumbed to typhus. Sensing her end, she requested to be carried out through the back door to spare her still-ill son the distress. Korczak learned of her death only after regaining consciousness and suffered a severe nervous breakdown, feeling guilt-stricken and even suicidal for the rest of his life (Olczak-Ronikier 2011: 204).

Elżbieta Cichy (1994: 307) suggests that Korczak’s work *Alone with God* likely stemmed from one of the most agonizing events of his life—the death of his beloved mother. His bond with her was

exceptionally strong. It is significant that he selected a quote from Juliusz Słowacki's *Anbelli* as the motto for one of his pivotal pedagogical works, *Jak kochać dziecko. Dziecko w rodzinie* [How to Love a Child: The Child in the Family] (first published in 1919, cf. 1993a): "To be born is not the same as to be resurrected; the coffin will give us away, but it will not understand us like a mother." The motto chosen by Korczak speaks of the superiority of birth over resurrection, the irreplaceable nature of a mother's love and the emotions in her maternal gaze.

Extensive research into the pedagogue's Jewish ancestors from both paternal and maternal sides reveals individuals who were highly educated and held significant social and professional positions (including doctors, lawyers, writers, a translator, and a merchant), actively participated in community life. Alexander Levin (1999: 108) observes: "Korczak was acutely aware of his debt to his ancestors and conscientiously referenced his family's heritage, treating it with great reverence." Like many of his forebears, Korczak was sensitive to injustice and misery of others and he considered his involvement in community service—both as a doctor and a pedagogue to be the cornerstone of his life.

### *The family in Alone with God*

*Alone with God* is multidimensional, as it features prayers voiced by a wide array of individuals: young and older women, men of various ages, older and younger children, both boys and girls, all from different social roles and functions.

Family members, their relationships with one another, and their connection to God are vividly depicted in prayers such as the "Prayer of a Mother (1)," "Prayer of a Mother (2)," "Prayer of a Young Child," "Prayer of a Boy," "Prayer of Complaint," "Prayer of a Girl," "Prayer of Gaiety," and the "Dedication."

Focusing on the theme of family, this analysis narrows in on the aspects of the text that relate specifically to familial relationships. As can be seen in the "Dedication", included in the prayer book, the deceased parents are portrayed as dictating these prayers to the writer—representing the prayers of various people those who truly prayed.

Mommy—Papa. You dictated these prayers to me in a rush; I had to laboriously, from memory—word by word, letter by letter—assemble and write them down. Sometimes I did not hear, often I did not understand, I made mistakes, my memory failed me, and I forgot a lot.—Rarely did you correct them—not much; just enough to make it clearer for me and for others. (Korczak 1922: 69)

A closer analysis of this old religious text reveals a figure of the mother, who is given the voice in two of the prayers. The first (pp. 7–9) is a monologue directed at two addressees: her infant and God. The child is addressed with the most tender and affectionate terms (*baby, sweet one, my one and only, my dearest child, sincere and only truth of life, dearest memory, tender longing, hope, encouragement, little one, my precious care, you delightful shackles of jasmine and stars, flower of forgiveness, joyful dream of redemption, sunny faith, gentle hope, rosy cloud, lark's song*). The mother's prayer is a desperate plea to God for happiness for her child who is the primary addressee of her words. She apologetically addresses God, saying:

God, forgive me for not speaking to You. And when I do pray, it is out of fear that a jealous You might harm them. I am even afraid to entrust them to You, God, because You take children away from their mothers and mothers away from their children. Tell me, why do You do this? This is not a reproach, God, but a question. (Korczak 1922: 7–8)

The mother is torn, struggling to decide whether she loves her child or God more. Ultimately, she concludes: “God, in loving this little child so completely, perhaps I am also loving You within him, because You are, You are in this Baby—God, the Greatest Mystery” (Korczak 1922: 8). Deeply in love with her tiny child, she makes a plea—almost a demand: “Give him happiness, God, so that he won't regret that we brought him into this world. I don't know what happiness truly is, but You do, and it's Your duty to know. So give it to him!” (Korczak 1922: 9). Her child becomes her prayer, as she says: “Say you will have no regrets about your life or about me; say it, my child; say it, my heartfelt prayer” (Korczak 1922: 9). Alicja Mazan-Mazurkiewicz writes:

The child is almost sacralized—it becomes a source of hope. Yet, at the same time, it appears fragile, threatened not so much by death, but by the possibility of losing its own sense of worth. The mother encounters



God in the ethical realm, sharing the responsibility for the life she has brought into the world. (Mazan-Mazurkiewicz 2017: 95)

The mother's first prayer, as shown above, is for her infant (Korczak 1922: 7–9). In her second prayer, another mother poignantly thanks God for helping her understand the tragedy that had befallen her. She once complained that her son had been killed and that the Fatherland had taken him from her. But now, God has made her see that the Fatherland had not taken her son away—it “adopted” her “dearest child” and gave him a beautiful death (Korczak 1922: 61). Here is the full text of the prayer:

God, forgive me for my complaints.  
I once said: my son was killed, the Fatherland took my son from me,  
and he sacrificed his life.  
But I didn't understand. Thank you, God, for enlightening me.  
Now, I say: You have called my son to Yourself,  
and the Fatherland has adopted my dearest child.  
It didn't take him away; it gave him a beautiful death.  
I cry tears of joy and pride knowing that my beloved soldier  
stood before You and reported:  
“At Your command, Lord God.”  
The Fatherland gave him a beautiful death.  
Thank You for helping me see this. (Korczak 1922: 61)

In the poem “Prayer of a Young Child,” a mother is depicted as a merciless aggressor who uses verbal and physical violence against her daughter. In a text stylized as if spoken by a child, a little girl named Zosia prays to God, complaining about her mother who is hurting her. The prayer is a testimony to the child's fear, pain, and sense of guilt, as well as the harm she has suffered. It also shows her resentment toward her own body because of her mother's cruel treatment.

In “Prayers of a Boy,” the praying boy asks God to remind his uncle of a promise he made:

I know it's not polite to ask. But I'm not asking You, good God, for anything else. My uncle promised me a watch if I did well in school. Just help me by reminding him of his promise. I'll do my best, and it doesn't really matter whether he gives it to me now or later. I told my friends I would get a watch, but they don't believe me. They'll laugh at me, thinking I lied or was just bragging. Please help me, God. It's so easy for You—you can do anything. Help me, my Good, my Golden God. (Korczak 1922: 10)

In the pages of *Alone with God*, which is poignant in both content and tone, we encounter several other figures: a mother worried about a child who does not know how to obey (Korczak 1922: 43); a loving mother, filled with trepidation about her infant's future; another mother struggling with the trauma of losing her son; a cruel mother who fails to understand the emotional needs of her young child; and a mother who is vainly called upon in a moment of despair: "I cry out: 'people'.—No answer. I call out: Nothing. With a final cry, I call out: 'God.' And what? Nothing—alone" (Korczak 1922: 26).

In the poem "Prayer of Gaiety," a young girl's longing takes the shape of her mother's face: "After every empty fleeting joy comes sadness and longing. And in that longing, like in a mist, I see my mother's face, and hear the whisper of the Fatherland, feel the weight of people's misery, and see the Greatness of Your Mystery" (Korczak 1922: 50). In "Dedication," we see the author's parents praying, and in "Prayer of a Little Boy," a child prays for his mother, father, and uncle: "Help me, Dear God, not to sin, give Mommy and Daddy long life and good health, and remind my uncle about this watch" (Korczak 1922: 11).

## Conclusions and prospects for further research

Korczak's *Alone with God: Prayers of Those Who Do Not Pray* can be seen as a kind of memorial to his parents and ancestors, as indicated by the "Dedication" included in the work. The prayers within this collection represent the legacy passed down to him by the "immortal chain of generations" (cf. Korczak 1929: 10–11). This inheritance encompasses a deep understanding of others—their dreams, desires, and the rich array of their emotions, ranging from the darkest to the brightest. It also includes the ability to articulate these emotions and convey them through language.

In this article, I have examined the structure of *Alone with God* and the semantics of this text, with special attention to the depiction of family within this collection of prayers.

Future research should delve into how Korczak linguistically crafted the prayers of the various characters, including:

- The prostitute in "Prayer of a Light-hearted Woman."

- Those struggling with depression in “Prayer of Sorrow” (cf. “Such sadness. Oh God, such sadness. Gray sadness. Oh God, gray sadness. Neither sounds nor colors; God, neither colors nor sounds. Just sadness, God, sadness”—Korczak 1922: 17), “Prayer of Impotence” and “Prayer of Complaint.”
- Individuals rebelling against God in “Prayer of Complaint” (cf. “I lost my way in the gloomy twilight, and God went somewhere far away; and left me alone. I hung my complaint on a string of tears on my neck. This is Your fault, God”—Korczak 1922: 27) and “Prayer of Rebellion.”
- Those who meditate in “Prayer of Reflection” (cf. “It is a wonder that one can gaze so long at a forest, at one forest tree, at one tree branch, at one leaf, at one vein of the leaf—and such strange hours flow through the soul”—Korczak 1922: 31).
- Those feeling unity with God in the “Prayer of Reconciliation” (cf. “I have found You, my God, and I rejoice like a stray child who spots a familiar face from afar. I have found You, my God, and I rejoice like a child who, awakened from a nightmare, greets a gentle face with a cheerful smile. I have found You, my God, like a child who escapes the care of a stranger and, after so many hardships, finally nestles against a loving heart, listening to its soothing song”—Korczak 1922: 36).
- Those worshipping God in the “Prayer of Joy.”
- The elderly in the “Prayer of an Old Man.”
- Humble and modest people in the “Prayer of a Humble Person” (cf. “Oh, God, I do what I can. I can do little, so do little. And You know, Oh God, that I do everything honestly. Not all people can be wise”—Korczak 1922: 53).
- The well-educated in the “Prayer of a Scholar.”
- Artists in the “Prayer of an Artist” (cf. “Thank you, Creator, for creating the pig, the elephant with its long trunk, for fraying leaves and hearts, for giving black faces to Negroes(!) and sweetness to bees. Thanks for the nightingale and the bug, for a girl’s breasts, for the fish that struggles for air, for lightning and cherries, for the way we are born into this crazy world, for fooling man into thinking things couldn’t be otherwise, for giving Thought to stones, to the sea, to men”—Korczak 1922: 63).

Additionally, it is worth examining the different types of prayers represented in this collection. Future research should also consider the few but significant literary influences (e.g., Jan Kochanowski, Young Poland) and the impact of Korczak's work on other artists (e.g., Jan Twardowski). Furthermore, attention should be given to the stylization of the language used in various prayers spoken in the voices of different people—adults, children, the elderly, artists, a prostitute, individuals with mental health challenges, and others).

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# The Role of Interiorization in Teaching According to St. Augustine

## ABSTRACT

The article presents the role of interiorization in teaching as it appears in the writings of St. Augustine. It is based on an analysis of selected of his works and other sources interpreting his teaching in various contexts. The article defines the concept of interiorization, first referring to the teaching of John Paul II, and then showing the way that St. Augustine understood this issue. Based on the source texts, concepts such as knowledge and wisdom, inner and outer man, and reason and heart are distinguished. The insufficiency of words in the pedagogue's process of conveying values is also indicated. The analysis made it possible to determine the goal of teaching, which, according to St. Augustine, is to gain wisdom through love. In the final part, the concept of the "Inner Teacher" is presented, which helps to internalize the knowledge of non-sensory things. The article is an attempt to draw attention to the role of interiorization in teaching and it indicates practical implications for the success of the educational process.

## Introduction

Explaining the concept of interiorization as understood by St. Augustine requires revisiting the most important notions related to inner experience and Augustinian anthropology. A crucial

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aspect of this is St. Augustine's view of human functioning, especially concerning the soul and heart. Understanding these elements helps clarify the importance of internalizing knowledge in the learning process. The educational principles that St. Augustine advocated and his strategies for inspiring the pursuit of wisdom are equally significant. Interiorization should occur within the teacher-student relationship, but, more importantly, according to St. Augustine's distinction, it should happen within the relationship between the outer man and the inner man. This essay also addresses the obstacles that can hinder the process of interiorization, whether they arise within the teacher or the learner.

St. Augustine's teachings on this key concept remain foundational, and influence both contemporary pedagogical and philosophical trends. He refers to universal and timeless values such as love, faith, hope, and wisdom, all of which originate from God, who resides within each person. This divine presence, known as the silent voice of the "Inner Teacher" is the focus of the third part of this article. This idea is one of the most vital elements of St. Augustine's teachings, frequently referenced in his sermons and writings.

## The concept of interiorization in teaching

In his writings, particularly in *Initial Religious Education* (1952), St. Augustine presents the teaching process within a broad framework, i.e. as humanistic education. The goal is to teach students existential reasoning (Marek, Walulik 2017: 30). According to St. Augustine's approach, teaching should be understood as "the totality of interactions occurring in the course of mutual relationships between two persons" (Milerski 1998: 123–124). The effectiveness of this process is enhanced when both individuals involved engage in interiorization.

Interiorization, or internalization, involves incorporating something into one's personal experiences or thoughts (*Słownik języka polskiego* 2023). Karol Wojtyła describes its role as follows:

A person not only cognitively enters the world of objects and even finds himself in this world as one of these objects, but also has this whole world in the reflection of consciousness, which he lives most intimately and personally. For consciousness not only reflects, but also, in a special

way, internalizes, or interiorizes that which it reflects, giving all this a place in the person's own "I." (Wojtyła 2011: 83)

Therefore, it is not enough to simply experience a variety of impressions or gain knowledge about a subject. What truly matters is making room for that knowledge in one's own consciousness. Only then can a person recognize something as genuinely "their own." In psychology, interiorization is described as:

the process of transforming overt behavior into covert cognitive processes, occurring during cognitive development. Interiorization is related to the observation that most cognitive activities initially manifest in behavior and are only later internalized. (Nęcka, Orzechowska, Szymura 2020: 29–30)

In developmental psychology, Jean Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory, which was based on the principles of organization and adaptation, is particularly relevant to understanding the role of interiorization in learning. Organization in other words, refers to the mind's ability to categorize and classify new experiences; that is, the ability to form patterns that are essential for adaptation. Within adaptation, we can distinguish two processes: assimilation, which allows new information to be interpreted by incorporating it into existing mental structures, and accommodation, which involves altering those structures to incorporate new information (Piaget 1966: 152–157). According to Piaget, intellectual development consists of changes taking place in the child's mental structure. "The true criterion of intellectual development taking place is the ability to change old ways of thinking in order to solve new problems" (Turner, Helms 1999: 51).

In Polish psychological literature, the term "internalization" is often used synonymously with interiorization. However, social psychology tends to reserve "internalization" for describing how a person adopts the norms, values, and attitudes of a particular social group (Trempała 2011: 57). In this article, interiorization refers broadly to the internalization of all external content, including norms, values, and attitudes. Many of St. Augustine's writings speak of the importance of inwardly experiencing the subjects of learning, including oneself. The heart, which, in St. Augustine's view, is assigned a very important role in the learning process, helps in this process of interiorization. It can be said that, according to Augustine, heart is the

most important thing in all human existence, even more so than reason. It is the heart, not the mind, that remains restless until it finds rest in God (Augustyn 2007: I, 1). While the mind should be illuminated by faith and love, the root of all knowledge and action is the heart. This is why St. Augustine wrote: “Love and do what you will ... Let the root of love be in the heart, and only goodness will grow from it” (Augustyn 1977b: 7, 8). Where there is true love, knowledge will never be used for an evil purpose, which is why the heart, according to St. Augustine, is so important (Tack 2006: 15).

St. Augustine believed that stirring the heart of the student is one of the teacher’s most important tasks. He also recognized that this is only possible when the teacher speaks from the depths of their own heart. One scholar of the medieval philosopher’s life observed:

With his genius for choosing the right words in preaching homilies, he surpasses all the Church Fathers. Each time he managed to say the issues raised in such a way that they became unforgettable for the listeners. Anyone who also reads many of his sermons nowadays will get the same impression that people of his contemporaries had: no words delivered from the pulpit came so much from the heart as Augustine’s words. (Van der Meer 1961: 412)

As the years passed, St. Augustine became more and more convinced that the mere sound of his words could, at most, reach the ears of his listeners. For those words to travel from the ears to the heart, divine grace is needed. He argued that, regardless of the speaker’s skill, if the listeners do not receive the grace that allows the teaching to penetrate the heart, the words will remain fruitless: “Whether, by our word, we plant or water, we are nothing; but He who gives growth, God, i.e. His anointing, teaches you about everything” (Augustyn 1977b: 3, 13).

The Bishop of Hippo experienced this firsthand when, as a young man, he read Cicero’s *Hortensius*. The dialogue stirred in him a deep love for philosophy, but many years later, he recalled that it did not fully touch his heart because it lacked the name of God.

This book contains an encouragement to philosophy, and is titled *Hortensius*. It was the one that changed my feelings ... ; it encouraged not to one sect or another, but to love wisdom itself, whatever it might be; to seek it, to walk in its footsteps, to grasp at it, to cling to it with all my might. It ignited me, I burned. And this ardor cooled in me only by

the fact that the name of Christ was not there. ... And if that name was lacking somewhere, then even if the work had the most exquisite literary form and proclaimed true things, it could not capture the whole of me. (Augustyn 2007: III, 4)

From the above statement, we see a key condition that St. Augustine considers essential in the teaching process: the presence of Jesus. This topic will be explored in the third part of the article. Another important point St. Augustine raises here is the goal of interiorization, which is the love of wisdom. In his writings, he distinguishes between two types of wisdom: natural and supernatural. Natural wisdom involves the ability to discern truth through reasoning and contemplation, guiding one's life toward ethical good. Because of this, natural wisdom is often referred to in his works as "the way of life," "prudence," ethical values, or piety (Sienkiewicz 2011: 152–153). However, St. Augustine stresses that this natural wisdom must be complemented by a supernatural element:

Wisdom refers not to past things, not to future things, but to those things that are independent of the changeability of time. For it is not possible to say of the things that they were and have ceased to exist; or that they will be, but are now gone. No, because they had the same existence and always will have. (Augustyn 1996: XII, 14, 23)

In St. Augustine's thought, wisdom is primarily theocentric. Alongside wisdom, human cognition also includes knowledge:

The essential difference between wisdom and knowledge is that intellectual cognition of eternal things belongs to wisdom, while rational cognition of the realities of this world belongs to knowledge. (Augustyn 1996: XII, 15)

Because of this fundamental difference, the methods people use to acquire wisdom and knowledge also differ. Knowledge can be acquired by the "outer man" through sensory perception and reasoning, making it accessible to all. Wisdom, however, is the domain of the "inner man" and can only be attained by a few pure minds (Kowalczyk 2007: 33–35). Are wisdom and knowledge opposing concepts? While they may seem so at first glance, they are not mutually exclusive. St. Augustine often spoke of how knowledge can aid in the pursuit of true wisdom:

Knowledge is, in its own way, a good, if what “inflates” or “may inflate” it is subordinated to the love of eternal goods, which, as we know, “builds up” ... Without knowledge there are no virtues that give life its true direction. (Augustyn 1996: XII, 14, 21)

Knowledge, then, serves a subservient role to wisdom. While it is correct to assert that knowledge is not an end in itself, such a strict separation between the object of knowledge and wisdom is not as applicable today. Even St. Augustine was not overly rigid about this distinction (Kowalczyk 2007: 37–38).

The most important step toward attaining true wisdom is to turn inward: “Do not go out into the world; return to yourself: truth dwells in the interior of man” (Augustyn 1999c: XXXIX, 72). The starting point, then, is the awareness of one’s own existence, the so-called empirical self, rather than the transcendent self. Since humans can only experience themselves as finite, limited beings, this perspective, in turn, leads to the discovery of God as pure being (Kłoczowski 2001: 69–70). The next step in acquiring wisdom is the purification of the senses, which involves critically examining one’s own lifestyle, conduct and the attachments of the heart. Such attachments can obstruct the pursuit of truth.

Martin Heidegger, in his commentary on St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, reminds us that not all people desire true happiness because they are distracted by other pursuits.

In actual life, people in one way or another have a feeling that something is appropriate; they live among such things and for such things as meaningful. Since this “living” and experiencing are already absorbed by them, they give themselves over to them, therefore these things are and become something that makes it possible to obtain fulfillment in the pursuit of truth. “Loving something else, they want it to be the truth” (*Confessions*, X, 23, 34)—they love the thing because of the tradition, fashion, convenience, fear of anxiety, or fear of the emptiness that could suddenly engulf them, and thus, in that and through that, the thing itself, precisely in and through this actual deviation, becomes “truth” itself. (Heidegger 2002: 192–193)

It is impossible to reach objective truth if a person has replaced it with things they have chosen and loved for themselves. These are merely substitutes for the truth, attempting to fill the emptiness of the heart. Perhaps for this reason, St. Augustine recommends knowing oneself, and cautions against the desire for anything sensual:

[Some] think that it is in things that there is some great ugliness. The most important reason for this error is that man does not know himself. But in order to know oneself, one must long become accustomed to escaping from the senses, to focusing one's mind and closing it in within oneself. ... Well, a mind so devoted to itself understands what the beauty of the universe consists in. The beauty owes its name to unity. That is why it cannot be viewed by a soul that tries to embrace many things and impoverishes itself through greed, not knowing that it can avoid poverty only by separating itself from the "crowd." When I say "crowd," I do not mean people, but the multitude of everything that falls under the senses. Not surprisingly, the more the mind strives to embrace many things, the greater lack it feels (Augustyn 1999b: I, II, 3).

An objective understanding of human nature is only possible through the method of interiorization in the study of the human being. St. Augustine expressed his wonder at the complexity of humanity, writing, "A great and mysterious abyss is man ... it is easier to count his hair than his feelings and the stirrings of his heart" (Augustyn 2007: IV, 14). While empirical methods help us understand a person externally, they often overlook the interior and subjectivity. In contrast, St. Augustine developed a philosophy of the human being that centers on experiences and inner values, viewing a person as a subject rather than an object. For Augustine, the path of interiorization is the essential approach (Kowalczyk 2007: 73). This concept is particularly important in pedagogy, where a teacher's relationship with a student should involve not only imparting theoretical knowledge but also viewing students as subjective entities and engaging with their inner values and experiences.

### Anthropology according to St. Augustine

A vital aspect of St. Augustine's understanding of interiorization is his perception of human nature and learning. Influenced by Platonic philosophy, Augustine believed that a person is composed of both soul and body. Initially, like Plato's followers, Augustine viewed the body objectively and even negatively (Drever 2013: 16–47). However, as his philosophy matured, his views evolved. When asked whether the body comes from God, Augustine replied, "Every good comes from God; everything that has a shape (is beautiful), is good to the extent that it is shapely. And any body, in order to be a body,



is contained in some shape. Thus, every body comes from God” (Augustyn 2012: 29). The human soul, in contrast, reflects the Holy Trinity.

For there is the Trinity, and thus wisdom and knowledge of self and love toward self. We have discovered such a trinity also in man, and it is formed by the spirit, the cognition with which he knows himself, and the love with which he loves himself. These three things are in man, without, however, being man. Man—according to ancient definitions—is a rational, mortal animal. The things mentioned are the best in man, but they are not man himself. (Augustyn 1996: XV, VI.10–VII.11)

It is in the Trinity embodying the likeness to the Creator, which distinguishes people from animals (Eckmann 2003: 75). According to Augustine, soul is not the person itself but is an integral part of them. He often referred to the soul as *spiritus*, a term that encompasses the essence of life, the phenomenon of movement, imagination, sensory memory, and the mind (Kowalczyk 2007: 77–78). It is clear from his writings that the soul comprises both the mind and the heart, and the concept of memory applies to both aspects.

The mind, according to the Bishop of Hippo, is “as it were, the head of the soul, or the eye, or the face, but these things are not to be taken bodily. So the mind is not the soul, but is that which is noblest in the soul” (Augustyn 1996: XV, VII, 11). Here, Augustine distinguishes between “lower reason” (which provides knowledge) and “higher reason” (which leads to the knowledge of wisdom) a distinction analogous to knowledge and wisdom (Kowalczyk 2007: 78).

However, the true spiritual center of a person is not the mind, but the heart, which also plays a key role in decision-making (Wendlik 2017: 63–64). The senses relay information to the heart, the most important part of the soul, yet the heart remains dependent on them.

See how all the senses of the body inside notify the heart of what they sense from the outside. See how many servants one inner ruler has, and what he himself does without his servants. The eyes notify the heart as to what is white and black; the ears notify the heart as to what is sonorous and what is not harmonious; the sense of smell informs the heart as to what smells beautiful and what is repulsive; it heralds the taste to the heart as to what is bitter and sweet; the touch notifies the heart as to what is soft and sharp. And the heart itself notifies itself what is just and unjust, what is evil and what is good. (Augustyn 1977a: 18, 10)

In Augustine's thought, the heart also symbolizes a God-inspired journey toward the true self. Importantly, the Bishop of Hippo repeatedly emphasized the role of community in this journey. Thus, interiorization, as he understood it, should not be confused with introverted spirituality (Martin 2003: 41–43). The journey to the heart is not an end in itself; rather, it is the starting point for achieving full participation in a community united by love (Marin 2013: 200).

According to St. Augustine, the primary motivations for acquiring knowledge are authority and reason: "I have adopted as a fixed principle not to depart, in any way, from the authority of Christ, for I see no greater authority" (Augustyn 1999e, XX, 43). As for reason, Augustine explains: "The soul says to itself: 'I can, by means of a certain inner and hidden movement, distinguish and associate things I am to learn, and this power of mine is called reason'" (Augustyn 1999b: II, XVIII, 48).

Heidegger, in his analysis of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, also recognises the importance of memory (Latin: *memoria*), a concept that Augustine explored in great depth. Heidegger notes that memory contains numerous images of things and everything that a person thinks about them. When we call upon memory to bring something forth, some images appear immediately, while others take time. The process of how a person recalls these various contents in memory is particularly intriguing.

Every content that enters it is ordered according to its form of access and its kind: colors, sounds, smells, tastes ... everything that comes from the outside from material bodies, and everything that comes from my own interior ... Even in the dark I can distinguish black from white ... In this way, I can arrange not only sensual objects, but also, for example, theorems and rules, theses, and scientific problems. (Heidegger 2002: 175–176)

When it comes to numbers, mathematical quantities, and abstract concepts that do not represent tangible things, we derive our understanding from our own consciousness, making them cognitively present. As Heidegger notes, "Since 'scientific objects' are not grasped cognitively, but we have them ourselves, what exactly is the acquisition of cognition, learning? Nothing other than collecting, organizing things that, in terms of thought, are 'stuck' disordered in *memoria*, scattered and neglected" (Heidegger 2002: 177).



St. Augustine expresses a similar view in his treatise *On the Teacher*, where he argues that when we hear certain words, we only recognize their sound. We understand their meaning only if they are already stored in our memory. If they are not, hearing them might at most, encourage us to search for their meaning.

Words have only the value of stimulating us to look for things, but they do not show them to us in such a way that we can know them. In order to teach me something, it is necessary that the object I want to know should appear to my eyes, or act directly on any of my senses, or present itself to my mind alone. (Augustyn 1999a: XI, 36)

For concepts that can be understood through the senses, St. Augustine recommends an approach to teaching that involves more than just presenting information briefly: “The point is not to show this [learning] as if in scrolls and take it immediately out of sight, but, pausing for a time, to resolve it and to unfold it, and to present it to the mind of the hearer, which is to be looked at and admired” (Augustyn 1952: III, 5). Augustine’s concept of the soul as heart, mind, and memory, with the heart being the most significant, helps explain why he believed the heart played a key role in the process of internalizing values.

### The concept of the “Inner Teacher”

St. Augustine was struck by the realization that even those without formal education can be happy. This insight led him to conclude that true happiness cannot be derived solely from acquired knowledge.

A man who knows that he possesses a tree, and thanks You for using it, even if he does not know exactly its height or the width of its leafy crown, is in a better situation than one who has carefully measured it and counted all its branches, but does not possess it, as well as neither knows nor loves its Creator. Likewise, a believer disposes of the riches of the whole world: since he has clung to You, to whom everything is subject, even though he has nothing, he possesses everything. Who would doubt that such a man, even if he does not know the path of the Great Bear, is in a better situation than another who measures the heavens, counts the stars, weighs the elements, and neglects You, who have determined every thing’s measure, number and weight. (Augustyn 2007: V, 4)

St. Augustine reveals the mysterious connection between knowledge and faith, which resides in the human heart and leads to true

happiness. While a teacher can teach students about the world and its principles, the most important thing is to guide them to discover that true happiness comes from exploring the mystery within themselves and the greatness of God. Augustine encapsulates this idea in his philosophical dialogues:

Why, then, wonder still about the ability to reason? Whether geometrical figures contain truth or truth is contained in them, no one doubts that our soul, that is, our mind, is capable of comprehending them, and therefore truth must be in our soul. (Augustyn 1999f: XIX, 33)

When it comes to non-sensory things, a person understands them by turning inward to the truth within.

When, in turn, it is a question of objects which we see with our mind, that is, with the aid of intelligence and reason, our words refer admittedly to things present, viewed in that external light of truth which the so-called inner man is enlightened by, but even then our hearer, if he himself also sees these objects in a pure way with the hidden eye of the soul, knows what I am talking about, not on the basis of my words, but based on his own inner vision. (Augustyn 1999a: XII, 40)

For St. Augustine, it is God—the Lord of all things—who “directs the minds of men without the mediation of any being” (Augustyn 1999g: 6, 1). This guiding presence is undoubtedly Christ within the human heart, who alone can instruct us on whether what we hear is true or not (Augustyn 1999a: XIV, 45). Although the concept of the “Inner Teacher” originated early in Augustine’s life (even before his baptism) during the philosophical dialogues at Cassiciacum, he frequently revisited this idea in his later writings and sermons. While the concept’s form and essential content remained unchanged, Augustine continually provided new insights on how to listen effectively to this inner teacher and reminded us how important it is:

Look here, brothers, at the great mystery! The sound of words strikes the ears, but the Teacher is within. Do not think that someone will learn something from people. We can admonish others with the sound of our voice, but if there is no one inside to instruct, the voice is meaningless. (Augustyn 1977b: 3, 13)

While teaching the faithful, the Bishop of Hippo became increasingly aware of the inadequacy of human speech. He recognized that it was impossible to communicate exactly what was in his heart to others through words alone, especially since each person interprets



language differently (Augustyn 1952: II, 3). As a result, St. Augustine advises:

He who cannot comprehend ... should turn to Him who opens hearts, and let him accept what He gives ... For we have Christ the teacher within. Whatever you cannot comprehend through your ear and through my mouth, turn with your heart to Him who instructs me in what to say, and distributes it to you as He wills. He knows what He gives and to whom He gives; He will support the asker and open to the knocker. (Augustyn 1977a: 20, 3)

Because of this inherent inadequacy of words, the heart—which St. Augustine sees as the center of the human soul—plays a great role in teaching. Some scholars even refer to this approach as the “pedagogy of the heart” (Latin: *pedagogia cordis*) (Díez del Río 2006: 45–46). According to St. Augustine, love is the necessary condition for discovering the truth: “Truth is not reached except by the way of love” (Augustyn 1991: 32, 18). Of course, in the regular order of time, it is knowledge that precedes love. St. Augustine says that love elevates knowledge and causes its growth through constant search. He explains this in *On the Trinity*: “Wherefore in all cases the love of a studious mind, that is, of one that wishes to know what it does not know, is not the love of that thing which it does not know, but of that which it knows; on account of which it wishes to know what it does not know” (Augustyn 1996: X, 3).

The Bishop of Hippo often used simple examples to illustrate complex ideas. He described this relationship as follows:

We must carefully consider of what sort is the love of those who are studious ... Now certainly, in those things whereof the word study is not commonly used, love often arises from hearsay, when the reputation of anything for beauty inflames the mind to the seeing and enjoying it; since the mind knows generically wherein consist the beauties of corporeal things. (Augustyn 1996: X, 1)

Drawing from the expressions used by the Bishop of Hippo, the Augustinians, who lived out his spirituality, coined the phrase “Things are known to the extent that they are loved.” This saying shows the deep connection between love and knowledge, which leads to the attainment of wisdom. It is especially fitting because it underscores St. Augustine’s essential point about the purpose of acquiring knowledge: it is not about possession or power, but about love.

Many educational institutions inspired by the Bishop of Hippo have adopted the motto: “Knowledge (or wisdom) is attained through love” (Díez del Río 2006: 46). The Augustinian approach to teaching, therefore, focuses not just on the content or method of learning, but, most importantly, the goal of education: the pursuit of true wisdom.

It is worth noting that a teacher may struggle to express in words what they feel more deeply with their heart than in the mind. St. Augustine’s effective teaching method is reflected in the words of St. Francis de Sales: “The heart speaks to the heart” (Latin: *Cor ad cor loquitur*) (St. Francis de Sales 2002: 333).

However, as previously mentioned regarding the concept of interiorization, a person might deceive themselves by drowning out the Inner Teacher in their heart. If someone mistakenly identifies something else as truth and happiness, they will chase after a goal that falls short of the God who dwells within them and may be led astray: “it is not the man who is mistaken who sees a false image, but only the one who believes the image to be true” (Augustyn 1999a: III, 3). According to St. Augustine, how can we prevent this phenomenon and listen more attentively to the voice of the true teacher? First, we must purify the eyes of the soul to free them from earthly attachments. After all, if reason is the eye of the soul,

the sight that is correct and perfect, that is, that which makes vision possible, and is called virtue—for virtue is correct or perfect reason. But even if the eyes are already healthy, sight alone will not succeed in turning them toward the light if these three virtues are lacking: faith, by which we believe that the sun, toward which we are to turn our gaze, is of such brilliance that the sight of it will make us happy; hope, by which we trust that we will see if we look well; love, by which we desire to see and enjoy having it. In this way, by looking, we come to behold God. (Augustyn 1999a: IV, 12)

Without such spiritual sight, true happiness remains elusive. Therefore, it is also important to teach others to care for the soul’s vision. St. Augustine calls for detachment from everything worldly, from what is sensual and changeable, urging us to turn wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ (Augustyn 2012: 27). This does not mean escaping from reality since ; true knowledge of oneself or God cannot come from focusing solely on one’s ego. One must go deeper. As St. Augustine suggests, “Cognition is possible only by comparison,



not by looking into oneself. Man is, by his structure and nature, dialogical, not monological” (Kłoczowski 2001: 60).

## Conclusion

St. Augustine, in many of his writings and speeches, stressed the importance of interiorization in human life, speaking directly to the hearts of his listeners. Through his demeanor, gestures, and fiery words, he spoke from the depths of his own heart, establishing what can be called a “pedagogy of the heart.” Although he never used this term explicitly, he certainly laid its philosophical foundation and embodied it in his teachings. Many of his texts refer to the mysterious chamber of the soul, where God communicates with humanity in a simple, often wordless way.

For St. Augustine, the ultimate goal of teaching was to lead others to truth, achievable only through true wisdom. He consistently asserted the importance of relying on God in this journey and working on one’s conscience in order to hear the gentle voice of the “Inner Teacher.” This message is particularly relevant today, as we face the chaos of information overload and a flood of words. Maintaining inner vigilance is a difficult task, but it should be encouraged in students, for only then can we impart true values to them.

St. Augustine borrowed the distinction between the outer and inner man from St. Paul. Outwardly, people resemble animals, but inwardly, they differ from them. These two dimensions of humanity have distinct dynamics and must be approached differently, yet they constantly influence one another. The outer man grows by acquiring knowledge and skills, moving from the external to the internal. The inner man, on the other hand, grows by expressing his inner self to others, enlightened by the light of grace from the “Inner Teacher.” In modern education, attention should be paid not only to the transmission of knowledge but also on the promotion of values. A teacher who is deeply convinced of certain values will naturally draw students to them. Through this exterior experience, students will internalize these values and make them their own. St. Augustine embodied this practice as he taught multitudes of believers and disciples with a heart inflamed by God’s grace, and through this, he inspired many to seek true wisdom on the paths of love.

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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,  
authenticity, courage

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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 (Kin-dziuk 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 (Żywcok 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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