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INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL ON DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN POLAND

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Abstract. For centuries Catholic Education is credited with trust in many countries. Over time the Catholic church has had great educational achievements. In Europe, in countries like Belgium, France and Holland half of all schools are catholic. However, we should remember that in those countries catholic education was not abolished as a result of politics like what happened in central-eastern Europe including in Poland, where after World War II catholic education practically had disappeared due to ideology and politics.

This article presents the influence of catholic schools on the development of education in Poland. Catholic schools fulfill their educational and upbringing mission at a certain time and place. The beginning of catholic education in our country dates back to XIII th century. At the beginning these institutions used to be singular and exclusive and located in parishes near Cathedrals and monasteries. Their character could be described as mostly religious, patriotic and moral.

The purpose of this article is to show how the church is concerned about the Christian values in education and the upbringing of youth. The article proves how catholic education has been regaining its power in Poland since 1989, when there were only 11 catholic schools (9 high secondary schools and 2 vocational schools) whereas in 2018 there were 610 catholic schools educating in different stages like primary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, technical schools and vocational schools. Catholic schools are among the top schools in Poland and are very popular with parents because of the high achievements of kids in the schools. The truth is that there is nobody like

parents when it comes to upbringing but at the same time catholic schools do support parents in this area while taking care of youth development. Undoubtedly, teaching and educational activity is part of the church mission, getting us closer to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Those are the motives which are guiding those who run the catholic education system in Poland today.

Key words: Catholic school; educational law; school governing authority; employee of Catholic school; student of Catholic school; mission of Catholic school; Teachers Charter's.

Streszczenie. Wpływ szkoły katolickiej na rozwój edukacji w Polsce. Szkolnictwo katolickie cieszy się od wieków zaufaniem w wielu krajach świata. Kościół katolicki na przestrzeni wieków ma duże osiągnięcia w dziedzinie edukacji. W Europie w takich krajach, jak Belgia, Francja, Holandia ponad połowa wszystkich szkół to szkoły katolickie. Trzeba jednak pamiętać, że w tych krajach nie zlikwidowano szkolnictwa katolickiego ze względów politycznych, jak to było w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, w tym w Polsce, gdzie szkolnictwo katolickie zostało po II wojnie światowej zlikwidowane z powodów ideologiczno-politycznych.

W niniejszym artykule został przedstawiony wpływ szkoły katolickiej na rozwój edukacji w Polsce. Szkoły katolickie realizują swoją misję edukacyjną i wychowawczą w określonym miejscu i czasie. Początki szkolnictwa katolickiego w naszym kraju sięgają XIII wieku. Były to najpierw pojedyncze elitarne placówki tworzone przy katedrach, klasztorach i parafiach. Miały one charakter przede wszystkim religijny, moralny i patriotyczny.

Celem tego artykułu jest próba przybliżenia troski Kościoła o dzieci i młodzież, by były kształcone i wychowywane zgodnie z wartościami chrześcijańskimi. Artykuł ukazuje, że szkolnictwo katolickie w Polsce odbudowuje się od roku 1989, wówczas było tylko 11 szkół katolickich (w tym 9 liceów ogólnokształcących i 2 szkoły zawodowe), a w roku 2018 było już 610 szkół katolickich, edukujących na różnych etapach kształcenia – szkoły podstawowe, gimnazja, licea, technika i szkoły zawodowe. Są to szkoły bardzo dobre, osiągające wysokie wyniki w nauce, dbające o bezpieczeństwo dzieci i młodzieży, chętnie wybierane przez rodziców i ich dzieci. To prawda, że nikt nie zastąpi rodziców w wychowaniu dzieci, ale szkoły katolickie chętnie wspierają ich, troszcząc się o integralny rozwój młodego człowieka. Niewątpliwie działalność dydaktyczna i wychowawcza szkół katolickich w naturalny sposób wpisuje się w posłannictwo Kościoła, przybliżając osobę Jezusa Chrystusa i Jego Ewangelię. Takie motywy przyświecają tym, którzy powołują do istnienia i prowadzą szkoły katolickie w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: szkoła katolicka; prawo oświatowe; organ prowadzący szkoły; pracownik szkoły katolickiej; uczeń szkoły katolickiej; misja szkoły katolickiej; Karta Nauczyciela.

In Poland we can witness a number of ongoing changes that affect rapid upbringing and education. Fast social and technological changes result in the quick devaluation of accumulated collection of experiences. Not only the system of values and sensitivity of adults is being changed by this process, but also children and youth. It is important to be aware of the fact that Catholic schools all over the world do not try to become a rival or an alternative for state schools, but they supplement them with Christian values. Catholic schools interpret their mission and tasks towards children, youth, family and society within the Church listening carefully to its teachings to become a place where one can acquire knowledge and embrace faith.

Catholic schools are a community of particular importance valued by state and Church institutions which help parents to provide their children with proper education and upbringing. Catholic schools fulfill their mission within a specific social, religious, political and cultural context. They should be universal, it is open to children and young people whose parents want them to be sent to Catholic schools.

In this article I would like to present the influence of the Catholic school on the development of education and upbringing in my country, in Poland. The article has been divided into three basic parts. In the first part, I will briefly present the history of Catholic education in Poland. In the next part of the article, I will present the Catholic Schools Council, an organization that supports upbringing and education in Catholic schools. In the last part of the work, I will describe new challenges for Catholic education.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN POLAND

Early beginnings of Catholic education in Poland date back to the end of XII th century. It was the period when the first Catholic schools, called cathedral schools (due to their location in close proximity to cathedral), appeared in Poland. A significant development of their activity took place especially between XIII th and XIV th century in the period of the so called 'fragmentation'. There were 27 Catholic schools, including 13 cathedral schools and 14 collegiate schools in Poland between

1215 and 1364. It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of XVIth century Catholic education became a common process in Poland because schools were established on the premises of parishes. Polish schools were modelled on to the Western Europe style and were primarily developed within urban settlements like Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań or Lviv. The development of Catholic education was possible due to the involvement of the clergy, especially monks, since some orders, for instance the Jesuits, Oratorian Fathers or the Piarists, displayed a particular charisma in the field of educational activity.¹

Between 1772 and 1918, when Poland was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria, the educational activity of the Catholic Church was primarily aimed at the preservation of the Polish spirit among children and youth. Those troubled times were also the arena of a grand school reform in the Republic of Poland and the activity of the Commission of National Education (1773–1794).² It is worth mentioning that Catholic schools were established in Poland despite the fact that they were governed by an occupier and invader. For example, bishop Stanisław Zdzitowiecki (1854–1927) received in 1916, after 10 years of efforts and requests, the permission of the Prussian authorities to set up a Catholic school in Włocławek.³

Catholic education entered its intensive stage of development after regaining the independence by Poland in 1918. The aim of numerous newly-founded Catholic schools was the care, upbringing and education of children and youth in the spirit of harmony between science and faith, as well as the process of raising the social awareness onto a higher level of religious and intellectual life. Back then, Catholic education constituted

¹ See: B. Bilicka, *Nauczyciel szkoły katolickiej. Wychowanie do dialogu i tolerancji*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 149 (2007), p. 465; S. Litak, *Historia wychowania*, Kraków 2005, vol. 1, p. 63–65.

² Cf. S. Janeczek, *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 2002, vol. 9, col. 449–455.

³ Cf. M. Ziemkiewicz, *Historia Zakładu Naukowo-Wychowawczego im. ks. Jana Długosza we Włocławku w latach 196–1949*, Włocławek 2001, p. 17–20; R. Andrzejewski, *Była taka szkoła we Włocławku*, in: *Witając w progach odrodzonego Długosza*, Włocławek 2001, p. 7–13; J. Kędzierski, *Ksiądz Jan Długosz – wychowawca i nauczyciel, patron włocławskiej szkoły katolickiej*, „Zapiski Kazimierzowskie” 15/2015, p. 122–127.

one of the educational pillars of the Second Republic of Poland. However, the situation changed after World War II when the Communist regime abolished the majority of Catholic schools in Poland.

Although Catholic schools in Poland were closed after World War II between 1950–1962, not entirely, 11 secondary schools (including 9 high schools and 2 vocational schools) continued their work and they retained their identity. Due to the actions of the Communist regime, their progressive activity was limited to about 120 students per facility (one class group in each year). They were officially exempted from the fulfillment of the 'secular upbringing' which was a binding law between 1962 and 1989 based on the Education System Act. The duty of secular upbringing was repealed by the new Education System Act of 1991.⁴

The pedagogic character of Catholic schools, particularly the 'state' ones, was saved by catholic teachers and the presence of the Church in the social life, as well as by the dialogue of the Church with the secular authorities. People like Primate Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and distinguished Secretaries of the Polish Episcopate like Bishop Zygmunt Choromański and for 25 years, Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski significantly contributed to the cause. Because of this in the years of political breakthrough and regaining independence (1989–1990), it was possible the Church and its diocesan structures, to establish schools run by Church entities (dioceses, orders and parishes), societies and foundations.

In 1994 there were already as many as 70 Catholic schools. John Paul II during his stay in Łowicz on 14th June 1999 said. „I am pleased that in Poland many new Catholic schools are being established. This is a sign that the Church is present in a practical way in the area of education. These schools are to be supported, and conditions must be created to enable them to contribute to the common good of society in cooperation with the entire educational world in Poland”⁵

⁴ Cf. B. Bilicka, *Nauczyciel szkoły katolickiej. Wychowanie do dialogu i tolerancji*, p. 465–466.

⁵ Own translation from Polish into English, see: Jan Paweł II, *Homilia w czasie Mszy świętej, Łowicz 14 czerwca 1999*, in: J. Poniewierski (red.), *Służyć wzrastaniu w prawdzie i miłości. Wybór dokumentów Kościoła na temat szkoły katolickiej i wychowania*, Kraków 2009, p. 322.

In 2016/2017 there were 610 Catholic schools in Poland, divided as follow: 194 primary schools, 209 junior high schools, 134 senior high schools and 73 schools of different types: artistic, technical, vocational, for youth affected by upbringing and developmental difficulties and staying at social welfare institutions. Catholic schools hire over 10.000 teachers and educate 66.365 children and youth.⁶

2. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS COUNCIL – SUPPORT FOR UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Council of Catholic Schools established by the Polish Bishops' Conference in April 1994 was created as an expression of "pastoral care for the successful development of Catholic education in our homeland".⁷ According with the Statute given by the Polish Bishops' Conference: "The Council associates all Catholic schools in Poland run by church legal persons and schools that have been recognized as Catholic by a written decision of the diocesan bishop and are run by other legal or natural persons".⁸ Due to the initiative taken by lay Catholics, who got involved in the work of Catholic schools, it was possible to combine the activity of all Catholic schools and establish an ecclesiastical organizational unit of legal status, constituted by the Polish Episcopate, represented by their headmasters.⁹

The Catholic Schools Council is the centre for cooperation between these schools organizing the spiritual formation and further education of headmasters and teachers. Since the year 2000 constant training is provided annually in the form of three conferences for headmasters, the National Forum of Catholic Schools gathering of around 1000 participants

⁶ More on this subject, see: Rada Szkół Katolickich, *Informator adresowy szkół katolickich w Polsce*, Warszawa 2017.

⁷ See: Decree of the chairman of the Polish Bishops' Conference of 3.XI.1994; cf. A. Maj, *Szkolnictwo katolickie w III RP (1989–2001)*, Warszawa 2002, p. 125.

⁸ Own translation from Polish into English, see: Catholic Schools Council, *Statute*, art. 2.

⁹ Cf. S. Jeż, *Rada Szkół Katolickich – organizacja wspomagająca wychowanie w szkołach katolickich*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 149 (2007), p. 499.

for 2 days, the National Forum of Catholic Schools Youth gathering of around 2000 high school students in the middle of September. As a result of the initiative put forward by the Catholic Schools Council, the Polish Church has been organizing the Week of Upbringing for the last 6 years, due to the cooperation between the Catholic Schools Council and the Polish Episcopate. The National Bureau of the Council is organized in such a way that it provides every school with legal advice with headmaster's trainings in the abovementioned field and gives the school models of statutes and other documents. The Catholic Schools Council also runs a systematic publishing activity catering for the needs of the Catholic education including the extent of papal teachings. The Council Bureau supports and participates in the process of establishing new Catholic schools. All schools receive substantial support from the Council in the time of education system reform which is being introduced this year.¹⁰

Currently, there are 610 Catholic schools in Poland. These schools operate within the framework of the Polish education system as public (state) schools and non-public schools with public school accreditation. They are credited with trust in the society because they provide high standards of upbringing and education. It can be argued that they are among the top Polish schools. Catholic schools are trusted by Polish bishops, the Episcopate and Polish authorities and above all parents who decide to send their children there to be educated.¹¹

Catholic schools are a vital element of the pedagogic mission of the Church. Circles of teachers and headmasters of these schools are people who engage into the process of self-formation being well aware of their vocation. This kind of dimension of Catholic schools we want to take care of first and foremost. Catholic schools do not function as religious schools, though, that is exactly what they are. Nevertheless, they are open to students coming from families neglected in terms of religion and morality, students who are non-believers or of different faiths. In accordance with the continuously repeated message of saint John Paul II, we want to prepare students for peaceful coexistence and cooperation with all faiths.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 500–502.

¹¹ Cf. <http://rsk.edu.pl> (15.01.2019).

Catholic schools are highly thought of within the whole education system, which means a properly working educational institution. Headmasters participate in conferences and meetings with headmasters of schools operating within the area of a district or diocese. Teachers of Catholic schools appreciate their choice and share their experiences with other teachers. Catholic education does not conduct any specific advertising campaign – there is neither time nor means for such an activity. It simply testifies by means of its presence and fruits of its work. It also faces difficulties and obstacles, lack of understanding in certain communities, but it does not engage into confrontation.¹²

The Catholic Schools Council is an is a social partner of the Ministry of National Education and participates in the decision making of the constructed law at the stage of initial stage of law making and legislative process conducted in the commissions of the Polish Parliament. We ensure that well being of the school system is taken care of and have the opportunity, as Catholic schools, to raise and educate younger generations based on truth, honesty, integrity, heritage and ethics.

It should also be mentioned that since 1998 the Catholic School Council in Poland has been a full member of European Committee of Catholic Education in Brussels in Belgium.¹³ Conferences are organized twice a year in the individual member states. The Catholic School Council in Poland organized such a conference in March 2003.¹⁴ During all international meetings participants have the opportunity to get to know the problems facing catholic education, especially in the country where the conference is taking place.

3. NEW CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

For the first time since 1989 Poland is governed by a single party Law and Justice – PiS with total majority in the Parliament. Both the President and the Prime Minister come from the same political back-

¹² See: <http://rsk.edu.pl/pro-formatione/>

¹³ Cichosz W. (red.), *Formacyjna rola szkoły katolickiej*, Gdynia 2007, p. 48.

¹⁴ Cf. Interdiözesaner Katechetischer Fonds (Herausgeber), *Katolische Schulen in Europa. Innovation ist unsere Tradition*, Wien 2015, p. 82.

ground. In 2015 they won the parliamentary and presidential elections and promised to introduce many changes, including those in the field of education. The previous government was in power for eight years and was composed of centre-leftist parties promoting liberal agenda in numerous aspects of social and economic life whereas the present government is much more conservative and identifies more with Christian (the Roman Catholic Church) and national values. They have been in power for the four years and still command 40% in the polls. In Poland in 2019 we will have general election and European parliament election and in 2020 presidential election.

Catholic schools in Poland are very well established and are popular with parents. At present there are 610 catholic schools between primary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools, vocational and technical secondary schools. Four years ago, during the election campaign the present government promised a to close down junior high schools and incorporate them into primary schools. And it is ongoing process. This declaration is a serious problem for Catholic schools because over half of them are junior high schools and they will be shut down. According to the governmental promises they are to transform either into primary schools or secondary schools like high schools or technical secondary schools. In coming weeks, we will witness the publication of the ordinance and legal acts which will show the final direction of the reform of education. Obviously, it is not the intention of the present government to interfere with the Catholic Education-Catholic schools can count on the government support in adapting to the new law introduced on the 14 XII 2016.¹⁵

Until 2016 the education system in Poland was designed in the following manner: children from the age of two to six attended kindergarten. Primary school use to start at the age of seven until thirteen. After that children went to Junior High School where they studied until the age of 16. Next they had to decide if they wanted to attend either: 1) Senior High School or 2) Technical Secondary School or 3) Vocational School, until

¹⁵ The Act dated 14 December 2016 established the reformed education system, called – Education Law, published in the Journal of Law on the 14 January 2017, item 59, while its implementation is determined by Act dated 14 December 2016 – the provisions of the Act – education law, announced in the Journal of Laws on the 11 January 2017, item 60.

the age of twenty.¹⁶ From 2017 we have been observing slow changes in the education system being introduced by the government, following pre-election campaign promises. Junior High Schools are being eliminated and Primary School lasting 8 years has been introduced. Kids start primary school at the age of seven. This stage of education is mandatory for all children. After primary school teenagers with their parents have to choose next stage of education either 4-year high school, 5-year technical school or 3-year vocational school.

Public and nonpublic, including Catholic, schools in Poland are run in accordance with the national educational system. Education System Act prescribes school responsibilities, and applies to public, nonpublic, community and other types of schools. The obligation is to follow the core curriculum, which has to be included in every school program. The liberalization of education and upbringing is included in the current core curriculum. The chosen educational methods depend on the teacher, who has the right to broaden the teaching contents. Catholic schools in Poland are not compelled to follow a syllabus that may be in conflict with catholic teaching. In terms of the organization of education: “curriculum framework”, the syllabus, school semester, dates are set up by Department of Education and applies directly to public and indirectly to nonpublic schools. Polish Catholic schools have the right to select teachers and appoint them on different terms than in public community schools. This is important! We are aware of the formation responsibility and we can see the need for that. Thus, formation and additional training for teachers is about the teachings of the Catholic Church and proper education. Catholic schools’ teachers, similarly to community schools teachers, receive the same professional training and promotion rights under the existing law. They are employed in accordance with the Labour Code on temporary, and later, permanent basis.

Catholic Schools can freely select their teachers. Two acts of law are important here. First – “Teachers Charter’s” act of law, which is specific labour code for public school teachers and which limits the recruitment of teachers for those schools. This act does not apply to non-public schools

¹⁶ Cf. A. Maj, *Szkolnictwo katolickie w III RP (1989–2001)*, p. 38–39.

like Catholic schools or to public noncommunity schools.¹⁷ The second law is IX EU Directive which is part of EU antidiscrimination law.¹⁸ This directive allows for the selection of teachers based on their religious beliefs, which is of the highest importance for Catholic school. The legal reference for this directive is implemented in Polish Labour Code. In all schools the quality of education is directly controlled by the school Principal in conjunction with State Chief Education Officer and subordinate units. Public Catholic schools are supervised by the Regional Education Authority just like public community schools. The Regional Educational Authority also supervises nonpublic Catholic schools.

In Polish monocultural conditions, the majority of parents want their children to be admitted to a Catholic school. Despite the existing ideological threats, we have the freedom also in legal terms, to support Catholic education of their children. Teaching catholic ethos has never been challenged in court, but it does not mean that our cooperation with parents is always harmonious. There are many problems in Polish education that require an improvement. In particular: teaching contents listed in core curriculum, primary school starting age, respect for values during educational process, which seems to be nonexistent in the curriculum. Contrary to the Constitution and substantial entries in the education acts, there are gender ideology teachings in school textbooks. This needs to be changed, so that Catholic schools can assist parents and teachers in the upbringing of their kids in spiritual and Christians values. There are no areas of conflicts between the State and Catholic schools. There are no such areas. We hope for changes to reestablish Christian values in education and upbringing.

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In my opinion, European Catholic schools need to remain loyal to their core values and continue education based on the Church teachings, especially the teachings of Popes: Paul VI, John Paul II, Ben-

¹⁷ See: <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19820030019/U/D19820019Lj.pdf> (22.01.2019).

¹⁸ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008PC0426&from=PL> (12.01.2019).

edict XVI and the practical and pastoral teachings of Pope Francis. To be courageous means to care for spiritual development of teachers and school Principals. Special emphasis should be put on Church teachings concerning faith, anthropology, morality, personalism and bioethics.

In Poland, teachers and educators who are employed by Catholic schools are believers and church goers, identifying themselves with the teaching of the Church. This is important because we wish to educate children on the values of Christianity and understanding of the world and God who gives us the wisdom and beauty that surrounds us. No wonder that the Church is keen on opening catholic schools. They are the base for evangelization and healthy, strong moral rules. Every catholic school is facing many tasks, but emphasis is put on the stimulation and support of pupils and teachers in the area of individual and common apostolic mission, spiritual development and religious knowledge. It is important that individuals responsible for catholic schools inspire and encourage others for volunteering and charity work. Because only the person who treats their work in catholic school as an authentic vocation may help young people so that they could discover their passions and realize their vocations.

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