

**CHRISTIAN PATTERNS AND THE ETHICS – OPINIONS OF THE  
POLISH YOUTH TOWARDS HISTORICAL CHARACTERS**

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*Pokud narazíme na výrazy etika a křesťanská výchova, obvykle je stavíme do opozice. Přijali jsme za své, že etika by měla být spojena se sférou světských hodnot. Na druhou stranu křesťanská ctnost vyplývá z předpokladu víry. Ze stejných důvodů můžeme mluvit o světské etice a náboženské etice. Obě hledají hodnoty v různých zdrojích. Světská etika je definuje z pohledu lidského bytí, zatím co náboženská etika je spojuje s božím řádem.*

*Klíčová slova: Historické osobnosti; mládež; etika; křesťanské vzory*

*“People’s life experience in the human world is the foundation of human values.<sup>1</sup>”  
( Zdzisław Cackowski)*

When we encounter the notions “ethics” and “Christian education”, we usually tend to place them in opposition. We assume from the very start that ethics should be connected with the sphere of secular values. On the other hand, Christian virtues result from assumptions of faith. For the same reasons, we can speak of secular ethics and religious ethics. Both of them look for their values in various sources. Secular ethics defines them from the point of view of a human being, whereas religious ethics links them with divine orders. Within the European cultural circle, secular ethics makes use of the collective and individual experience of a man; the religious one, in turn, reaches to the Biblical message.

It is assumed, similarly, that the consequences of breaking the rules are as follows: in the first case – sanctions determined by individual assessment and social environment; in the latter case, the results go beyond up to the supernatural world.<sup>2</sup> We are confronting two philosophies (ontologies), one of which accepts, and the other one rejects the existence of supernatural entities. The Marxist ethics belongs undoubtedly to the latter family – according to it, it is man who is the supreme good and the measure of all things. (Still, we encounter the concept of “socialist humanism” in literature).<sup>3</sup>

The issues of seeking ethical or Christian virtues are, in fact, questions of the world of values, of moral models or guideposts. The ambition of school education has been to shape man in such a way so that he/she possesses not only knowledge and skills but also that a certain desirable attitude to the surrounding reality should be instilled in him/her. A view on the durability or invariability of these values is a controversial issue.<sup>4</sup>

Seeking historical examples as arguments in the work of upbringing and education has always constituted an important element of humanistic tradition – also when history was not a separate education subject. From the Middle Ages until the modern age, the historical science has been promoting a defined moral model, based on an authoritarian tradition that may be

<sup>1</sup> CACKOWSKI, Z.: *Geografia wartości*. Lublin 2009, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> ZIELIŃSKI, M.: *Religia a moralność*. Toruń, 2000, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> BARYŁA, J.: *Moralność i wychowanie*. Warszawa, 1985, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> CACKOWSKI, Z.: *ibidem*, p. 15.

simply characterized as a deeply Christian one. As opposed to the medieval model of the human being submitted to God's Will, in the Renaissance man started to be viewed as a part of a social community, and apart from the model of life symbolized by contemplation, a new model of an active life in conformity with the current political order emerges. The Jesuit educational system, the most popular one in the baroque times, was also based on that model, and the extremely strong position of the Society of Jesus – Order of Jesuits made it possible for the profoundly catholic educational system to be dominant in Poland. In consequence, Christian virtues were promoted and the characters and heroes personifying the deepest submission to Divine matters – the saints and martyrs – were the most appreciated. Only second-ranked were leaders and monarchs, praised – besides – as models of Christian knights.<sup>5</sup> A similar educational model was suggested by Piarist schools from before the reform time. The latter introduced an important new idea in the perception of virtue. Since then, only those outstanding historical figures were acknowledged as educational models who at the same time observed certain principles considered highly moral and humanistic. The confession of the person was not considered as important. However, the requirement for this figure to possess a religious cult remained important.<sup>6</sup>

The content of moral virtues represented by the educational systems of the three Partition countries remained unchanged and was based on the Christian canon. The acts and figures regarded as heroic often continued to be shown as educational models.

The end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe was a period of major social, political and ideological changes. There arose a confrontation of traditional educational models originating from the Christian tradition with the ongoing secularization of societies and the ideas promoted by communists. The Catholic Church robustly defended the values rooted in the faith. (The resolutions of the Second Vatican Council and the declaration of papal infallibility in questions of faith and morals as well as the encyclicals: „Immortale Dei” of 1885, „Rerum Novarum” of 1891, „Divini ius magistris”<sup>7</sup> of 1929 and „Divini Redemptoris” of 1937 turned out to be crucial.<sup>8</sup> These issues were also laid out in the „New Canon Law Code” of 1917.<sup>9</sup>

Following the regaining of independence by the Polish State, the legislator determined in Article 20 of the March Constitution of 1921: “There shall be introduced religious education, obligatory for all pupils, in every educational establishment that realizes the programme for children and youth up to 18 years of age and that is maintained by the State or local government bodies”.<sup>10</sup> The precondition of faith remained the indispensable element in the universal education system on Polish territories up to the outbreak of the war in 1939.<sup>11</sup>

The educational programme was not changed radically in the period between the end of the Second World War and the parliamentary elections in 1947.<sup>12</sup> However the manifestation of new

<sup>5</sup> FREYLIChÓWNA, J.: *Ideal wychowawczy szlachty polskiej w XVI w. i na początku XVII w.* Warszawa 1938, pp. 66, 67.

<sup>6</sup> MAJOREK, C. – SŁOWIKOWSKI, T.: *Wkład Pijarów w teorię wychowania patriotycznego i obywatelskiego w Polsce w XVIII w. In: Wkład Pijarów do nauki i kultury w Polsce XVII- IX w.* Warszawa–Kraków 1993, p. 470.

<sup>7</sup> *Encyklika Jego Świątobliwości Piusa XI z Bożej Opatrzności papieża... o chrześcijańskim wychowaniu młodzieży*, S. I. 1929, s. 41.

<sup>8</sup> *Wielkie daty chrześcijaństwa*. Wrocław 1997.

<sup>9</sup> ADAMSKI, S.: *Szkola wyznaniowa, czy mieszana*. S. I., s. a., p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i ważniejsze ustawy polityczne i administracyjne uzupełnione statutem Ligi Narodów oraz wyciągami z Traktatu Ryskiego*. Poznań 1924, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> KONARSKI, K.: *Sposób traktowania historii porzobiorowej w dzisiejszej szkole polskiej.*, *Pamiętnik IV Zjazdu historyków polskich w Poznaniu 1925*. Sekcja VII, S. I., s. a.; KONOPKA, H. – WÓJCİK-ŁAGAN, H. – STĘPNIK, A.: *Problemy edukacji historycznej i obywatelskiej młodzieży w latach 1918–1939*. Warszawa 1986.

<sup>12</sup> State Archive in Lublin (APL), Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Lubelskiego w Lublinie (KOSL), sygn. 1. Dziennik Urzędowy Resortu Oświaty, 1944, Nr I–IV.

moral models arose right after the elections – the Christian ideals were abandoned under the charge of being “petty bourgeois”. There was an absolute criticism of all types of cult. All individualism was despised – it was the community what mattered, which was characteristic for K. Marx demands. We can read in the propaganda brochures of the time, inter alia, that the pre-war school had brought up an “asocial individualist and egoist” who was to be characterized by: „greed or hunger for further possession, envy, fear of loss of possessed property and the craving for sensual pleasure.”<sup>13</sup> Previous positive characters – a hero, a knight or persons personifying Christian virtues were replaced by the apotheosis of people fighting for social liberation. Their highest embodiment were proletarian fighters.

After 1956, comments regarding cults were expressed in a softer manner (the Christian religion, however, continued to be depicted not in the spiritual but in the social context, as a confrontation of the affluence of the clergy against the poverty of the people. The perception of a historical hero changed only slightly. The assessments and judgments were based on the canon of virtues constituting the fighter for social justice, well tested in the period 1948–1956, but his/her social background was referred to not as frequently as before. National heroes, especially home country defenders, were appreciated to a greater extent. This model was applicable until the seventies. The next decade was characterized by relatively educationally neutral material in the school manuals. There was certain changes in the assessment of historical figures. Heroes representing proletarian activity were not promoted so categorically anymore; however, we cannot speak at all of any complete revision of these opinions.

The main theme of our deliberations is treating outstanding figures from the past as role models and making use of this fact for educational purposes during history education in schools.<sup>14</sup>

First attempts concerning historical figures – which have given certain insights into the preferences of young people – were carried out on the occasion of research on the state of youth consciousness in interwar Poland<sup>15</sup>. The following scientists (inter alia) conducted their research in the People’s Republic of Poland: B. Szacka<sup>16</sup>, J. Rulka<sup>17</sup>, or J. Mazur<sup>18</sup>, jointly P. Kwiatkowski and A. Szpociński.<sup>19</sup> These issues were also the subject of sociological literature. All abovementioned efforts focused mainly on historical consciousness as such, and the Authors’ interest did not go beyond problems related to the history of Poland. They were also restricted to deceased persons.<sup>20</sup>

Accepting such a criterion, as well as concentrating solely on figures from Polish history seems to be, however, an artificial limitation. More than in creation of historical personages’ individual popularity rankings, we are interested in the phenomenon of changes in their assessment by young people which implies getting to a certain sphere of ethical or moral values represented by the young generation.

<sup>13</sup> *Szkola w planie odbudowy*. Kielce 1947, pp. 3–13.

<sup>14</sup> MATERNICKI, J.: *Historia i wychowanie*. Warszawa 1973; HOSZOWSKA, M.: *Kształtowanie postaw patriotycznych w opinii nauczycieli historii szkół średnich*. In: *Wiadomości Historyczne*, 1993, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> BAILEY, S.: *Opracowanie wyników ankiet dotyczących zainteresowań młodzieży*. In: *Polskie Archiwum Psychologii*, 1932, nr II–IV; SKOWRONKÓWNA, I.: *Ankieta historyczna*. In: *Polskie Archiwum Psychologii*, 1932, nr II–III.

<sup>16</sup> SZACKA, B.: *Miejsce historii w świadomości współczesnego człowieka*. In: *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1973, nr II.

<sup>17</sup> RULKA, J.: *Kanon wybitnych Polaków w świadomości historycznej młodzieży*. In: *Edukacja Polityczna*, 1988, vol. XII.

<sup>18</sup> MAZUR, J.: *Zainteresowania historyczne uczniów szkół średnich*. Kraków 1986.

<sup>19</sup> KWIATKOWSKI, P. – SZPOCIŃSKI, A.: *Badania socjologiczne nad świadomością historyczną*. In: *Edukacja...*, ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> TRZEŚNIEWSKI, J.: *Zainteresowania historyczne uczniów wyższych klas szkoły podstawowej*. In: *Wiadomości Historyczne*, 1996, nr IV, p. 219 and following.

First own research was conducted late March/early April 1998. Participants of the survey were pupils of one of the Lublin high schools (secondary level), selected at random, and the History Students of the University of Lublin (UMCS)'s Faculty of Humanities. In total, 267 high school pupils and 96 students took part in the survey. Respondents were asked to answer two questions: 1. „Which historical personage do you rate the highest and why?” 2. „Which historical personage do you judge negatively and why?” As already mentioned, no limitation on answers relating to deceased persons was introduced. Where individual choice seemed unsatisfactory to the survey participants, a multiple choice was suggested. A basic requirement that was also a precondition for including a given personage in the prepared list was obtaining by him/her of at least two votes.

It was observed that both in the case of high school pupils and students, the list of positive choices was, on average, nearly twice as high as that of negative choices (in the first case the ratio was 61:36, and in the second one 43:24). This may indicate that it is easier and clearer to specify personages (which implies the values represented by them) who are intentionally unaccepted. Sensitizing to unaccepted figures and acts is more precise whereas virtue assessment criteria are vague. We simply notice easier evil, things and persons that we do not accept. We react to them also definitely in a more emotional, sometimes dramatic way. The choice of a particularly highly-esteemed person becomes thereby a matter of individual choice to a much larger extent than it is in the case of a condemned person. On the basis of the high school pupils' answers a list of 34 names assessed positively (each of which received at least two votes) was obtained. Definitely, the most highly-esteemed personage was J. Pilsudski – 36 votes, followed by Napoleon Bonaparte – 19, Wł. Sikorski – 17, Mieszko I and King Ladislaus Jagiello – 16 votes each, St. Hedwig of Andechs, the Queen of Poland – 11, King John III Sobieski – 10, T. Kosciuszko – 9, M. Sklodowska-Curie – 8, King Casimir the Great – 7, King Boleslaw I the Brave and C. Columbus – 6 votes each, St. Jeanne d'Arc and King Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski – 5 votes each, J. H. Dabrowski and Pope John Paul II – 4 (!) indications each, Queen Bona Sforza, E. Plater, Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko, N. Copernicus, King Stephen Bathory, Wł. Anders- 3 votes each, Diana, Princess of Wales, H. Sienkiewicz, H. Sucharski, J. Bytnar- „Rudy”, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, Julius Caesar, C. Darwin, H. Poświatowska, M. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Czar Peter I of Russia, St. „Grot”-Rowecki – two votes each.

As we see, there is a relatively large number of names belonging to highly moral persons among the choices made by high school pupils: St. Hedwig of Andechs, Jeanne d'Arc, Pope John Paul II, Rev. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and... – Diana, Princess of Wales. Such a great percentage of votes given to personages considered to be moral models may reflect great demand for authorities among young people at these times when the crisis of values is an undeniable fact.

On the basis of analysis of choices made by students, on applying similar standards, a list of 15 names was created. These are as follows: as in the first case, J. Pilsudski heads the list with 21 votes, followed by prince Mieszko I and King Casimir the Great – 8 votes each, rulers – Alexander of Macedon and King Boleslaw the Brave as well as Jesus of Nazareth, L. Walesa, R. Dmowski and T. Kosciuszko – 3 votes each; A. Lincoln, J. Zamoyski, Julius Caesar, M. Ghandi, and King Ladislas II Jagiello – 2 votes each.

Analysis of preferences of both high school pupils and university students allows us to come to the conclusion that the negative choices are subject to an extreme assimilation. Although the number of votes given varied, a definite negative judgment, or even condemnation, was expressed towards the leaders of two European dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Adolf Hitler

and Joseph Stalin. However, the disproportions of the votes given are very significant; among high school pupils it was 110 negative votes for the leader of the Third Reich against 55 such judgments relating to the leader of the Soviet Union. Correspondingly, on the basis of students' answers, the relation was 39 to 30. It is likely that the reason for diminishing the ratio between negative judgments concerning the personage of J. Stalin and A. Hitler is more comprehensive information on the generalissimo's activity that is gained by university students, or some deeper need to release stress connected with their opinions (a phenomenon typical in the case of being a long-term subject of information block). According to high school pupils, other leading anti-heroes were also: King Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski (charged with responsibility for partitioning of Poland) – 4 votes and L. Walesa (2). Both personages are not widely condemned – their names are also on the lists drawn up on the basis of positive choices. These figures were assessed more severely by students. L. Walesa obtained 3 votes on the list of positive choices and 4 indications on the “negative list”. King Stanislas Augustus was condemned in four cases whereas he could not be found at all on the list of positive historical heroes (!). Other indications are: King Augustus III (Saxon) of Poland – 4 votes, Z. Berling – 3; King Michael Korybut Wiśniowiecki, Napoleon Bonaparte, Prince Janusz Radziwiłł, H. Radziejowski, Lenin, J. K. Branicki, K. Mazowiecki and Wł. Siciński – two votes each.

The survey results show that any signs of political discrimination were assessed very severely – including murders committed on actual or alleged opposition members or people's enslavement in isolation or concentration camps. The acts of crime or betrayal of nation were subject to particular stigmatization which was especially underlined by young people. This implied lack of acceptance for any extremisms – tyranny as well as ideologies: nationalism and communism. Preferring one's own private matters to the ideas of the country or community is also unaccepted. And vice versa – the struggle for home country, own nation or ethnic group are assessed very highly. All persons inciting armed conflicts deserve, according to the respondents, an extreme condemnation. It refers both to people instigating local wars (B. Chmielnicki) and to those causing global disasters (A. Hitler). On the other hand, advocates of peace are highly appreciated (John Paul II, Paulus Vladimiri). One can say on the basis of the number of answers that genocide does not find any justification among young people and it is considered the greatest crime. In turn, military commanders and their victories are traditionally highly appreciated. Wrong decisions and political ineptitude are assessed negatively, whereas achievements in the fields of culture and science (herein geographical discoveries) as well as economy gain wide recognition. Services for religion are also noticed (conversion of Poland, Lithuania to Christianity). The analysis of survey forms revealed that persons dealing with charity (Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Queen Hedwig or Diana, Princess of Wales) are highly esteemed.

The next survey was carried out in the same high school (among 184 pupils) and in the Faculty of History of University of Lublin (UMCS) – among 107 students, in November 2009. As the Author's intention was that the surveys should be a continuation and a comparative material to the 1998 research, the respondents have been asked to answer the same questions. (Just to remind you: „Which historical personage do you rate the highest and why?” and „Which historical personage do you judge negatively and why?”). Additionally, it has been suggested that the respondents answer the following question: „May a historical figure be an educational ideal?” Similarly as in the case of previous surveys – the Author has skipped the names that have appeared only once, with the aim to obtain possibly the most representative results and not to develop too large a list of persons.

High school pupils' choices were as follows: among characters assessed positively, the largest numbers of indications were received by John Paul II and J. Piłsudski – 30 and 28 votes,

respectively, and these were definitely the most frequently given answers. Third place – let's say, in the middle of the pack – was taken by Queen Hedwig of Andechs – 13 votes, followed by Emperor Napoleon – 10 votes, King Casimir the Great and Prince Mieszko I – 7 votes each, and Lech Walesa – 6 votes; next positions in the ranking were occupied by: Jesus Christ, Jeanne d'Arc and Priest J. Popiełuszko and King Ladislas II Jagiello – 4 votes each, and Alexander the Great – 3 votes. At the end of the list were: T. Zawadzki „Zośka”, czarina Catherine of Russia, T. Kosciuszko, King John III Sobieski and King Bolesław the Brave, Zawisza the Black of Garbow as well as: Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Irena Sendler and St. Francis of Assisi. Seven among these 19 names represent the highest Christian virtues; actually, we can include also the Knight Zawisza the Black of Garbow, as an obvious example of a Christian knight, similarly as it is in the case of King John III Sobieski who was highly appreciated mostly from the aspect of battles against the Turks, and – last but not least – also Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko.

Personages explicitly condemned were A. Hitler and J. Stalin – respectively 107 and 33 votes; then Lech Walesa – 5 votes, King Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski – 4 and Catherine II, Prince Konrad I of Masovia, and (collective anti-heroes) – F. K. Branicki, S. Sz. Potocki, S. Rzewuski) – 2 votes each.

University students made similar choices. John Paul II and J. Pilsudski (26 votes each) had a clear advantage over the rest of the names, who were: L. Walesa – 6 votes, Prince Mieszko I – 5, King Casimir the Great – 4, R. Dmowski and Julius Caesar – 3 votes each. At the end of the list were placed: Queen Bona Sforza, Jesus Christ, Alexander the Great, M. Edelman and a collective hero – „Polish patriots” – 2 votes each.

Similarly, high school pupils considered as the most negative persons A. Hitler (72 votes), J. Stalin (38 votes), then B. Mussolini (3 votes), King Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski, Napoleon, Henry VIII, Lenin, Kim Ir Sen, J. Pilsudski and a collective figure – communist leaders who were given 2 indications each.

136 high school pupils replied affirmatively to the question „Can a historical figure be an educational ideal?” whereas 40 pupils were opposed; analogically, there were 101 positive and 20 negative answers given to the same question by students. The rest of the respondents in both groups did not take a definite stand on the issue. To begin with, one has to mention that young people have noticed the fact that there is a conflict between the perception of a figure (i.e. – what we know about him/her) and the fact of what he/she really was like. This constitutes an initial distinguishing feature. In fact, it is difficult to find an unambiguously ideal person. (Although John Paul II was considered as such, according to the respondents).

An analysis of statements of both students and high school pupils has revealed similar views of young people to the question of perception of the world of values represented by selected historical figures. A general distinguishing here was the notion of good and evil. Some characters were described as “good people”, and in relation to Stalin and Hitler frequently given answers mentioned that they “did evil”.

Appreciated virtues are moral authority (honour, courage), all personal talents – including diplomatic ones, and the most favoured are those contributing to keeping peace, ecumenism and tolerance, services for religion, political efficacy but – and here we again enter the sphere of values – only when the latter is based on legitimate ideals, determined by moral principles. Only in that case is faithfulness to ideals appreciated.

On the other hand, activities referring to failure to carry out one's responsibilities to one's own State are not accepted: these are self-interest and political weakness which result in weakening of the position of State, or finally betrayal of home country. Negatively judged types of behaviour are also those bringing negative social consequences: authoritarian forms of

government, racial discrimination, provoking repressions (especially when harming one's own nation). It is self-evident that the specifics of the research were negative judgments expressed towards the figures who, despite being extremely politically skilled, made use of their talents to the detriment of the Polish State (for instance, Catherine II condemned for the weakening of Poland). This confirms a strong emotional relation to the home country. The sphere described by respondents as "doing evil" seems to be more connected with moral categories; "doing harm", "degrading", or "humiliating others", imposing own views, religious persecutions or, finally genocide itself, were mentioned here.

Historical facts and figures are symbols of the hierarchy of important things and acts practiced by the people – they confirm it or violate, they are examples of glory or condemnation. Non-identical values prove to be attractive for everyone and in spite of the fact that we can observe certain cultural standard (truth, good, courage, honour, freedom, justice are generally appreciated), there is a lot of space left for individual choices. (The above cultural canon is subject to complications when ideological patterns prove to be binding. And in spite of the fact that the values imposed by them may be objectively appreciated – they become significantly enhanced, and there even arises a redefinition of them in certain cases. This is what their status was like between 1947 and 1989). Following the political transformation involving changes in educational programmes and manuals, resulting in the change of historical narrative, there has been a return to traditional perception of historical figures that we had known until 1939. The outbreak of the second World War and the specifics of this conflict, first of all the hecatomb of victims, has tremendously impacted the perception of world and moral judgments.

The analysis of surveys has shown that values connected with ideals of humanism or humanitarianism are the most appreciated. According to young Poles, a human being is definitely the highest value. Man's endangered life is an indisputable value, therefore Hitler and Stalin or extermination camps were condemned so drastically.

Whereas, in the case of identifying with ideals or morals, the tradition of Christian virtues still remains a rich source. Personages living on faith and capable of sacrificing their lives for it are highly appreciated (including supererogative attitudes presented, for instance, by St. Hedwig of Andechs who sacrificed her happiness for the faith, or by I. Sendler who saved so many lives).

## Shrnutí

### **Křesťanské vzory a etika – hodnocení historických postav mladými Poláky**

Pokud narazíme na výrazy etika a křesťanská výchova, obvykle je stavíme do opozice. Přijali jsme za své, že etika by měla být spojena se sférou světských hodnot. Na druhou stranu křesťanská ctnost vyplývá z předpokladu víry. Ze stejných důvodů můžeme mluvit o světské etice a náboženské etice. Obě hledají hodnoty v různých zdrojích. Světská etika je definuje z pohledu lidského bytí, zatím co náboženská etika je spojuje s božím řádem.