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THE HISTORY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN POLAND AND ITS PLACE IN EDUCATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF GDAŃSK

The present statement about the history of Polish Catholic education is like a journey in time and experiencing a cognitive adventure. The adventure is composed of three main interpretative acts. They are in close relation to contemporary methodological postulates. Taking into consideration the three dimensions of human cognition and the attitude towards science, we can distinguish the following postulates: *holistic* (general), *diachronic* (historical) and *synchronic* (hermeneutic *here and now*).

Being christened was for Poland an act of political will, but what is even more significant, the will to access all the societies propagating the Mediterranean culture. From the very beginning, creating Catholic education was done by the first Polish rulers. They were established and provided for monasteries and carried out their main mission which was evangelizing. Catholic schools taught young Poles real Christian life not only on a religious level, but on practical and scientific ones as well¹.

It is worth stressing here that in Ancient Greece the first schools creating an intellectual environment are dated from the turn of the seventh and the sixth century B.C., although national life is dated there at the turn of the seventeenth and the sixteenth century B.C. The correct beginning of discursive thinking is the activity of the Platonic Academy which existed more than nine hundred years (more or less from 387 B.C.-529 A.D.) Its base was in the Platanum Grove by the Kefisos River and it was devoted to the hero Akademos (hence the name). Scientific and teaching activities were held there. These activities were carried out and ranged from philosophy, politics, mathematics, astronomy, natural science, etc. The Platonic Academy was a real model for similar institutions of antiquity and modern times².

The more visible beginning of education in Poland took place during the life of Władysław Herman (1079-1102), when church reform was carried out in Rome. The Archbishop of Gniezno,

¹ W. Cichosz, *Formacyjna rola szkoły katolickiej*, Gdynia 2007, s. 25; D. Kempa, *Historia szkolnictwa katolickiego w Polsce*, w: *Szkolnictwo katolickie w Polsce*, Kraków 1999, s. 9; E. Mitek, *Pedagogika dla teologów*, Wrocław 2002; Ł. Kurdybacha, *Dzieje oświaty kościelnej do końca XVIII wieku*, Warszawa 1949; H. Roth, *Pädagogische Anthropologie*, Hannover 1971.

² W. Cichosz, *Formacyjna rola szkoły katolickiej*, dz. cyt., s. 24.

Henry, got St. Otto to educate Polish priests outside Polish society. St. Otto, who had studied in Warzburg, started Polish priests' formation in separate schools. The reign of Kazimierz Sprawiedliwy (the Just) who was well-educated himself, was a particularly fruitful period for Polish education. National cathedral schools here deserve our special attention. The actual heyday of Catholic education took place in the thirteenth century. Monastery schools were also established near monastic congregations and parish schools in bigger urban areas. Their main task was to teach basic calculations and the rules of Latin grammar. However, monastery schools were the better developed of the two and we can find there some teaching and educational programmes. Learning here was divided into two parts: *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and dialectics) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music)³.

It was extremely significant for Polish education that the Cracow Academy was established⁴. It was founded by Kazimierz Wielki (the Great) in 1364. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the development and organisation of Catholic education in Europe was dictated by the Society of Jesus (founded by St. Ignatius Loyola)⁵. Another significant point in the history of education were schools run by the Pijar Fathers which started to educate in the Middle Ages. The Pijar Colleges were teaching the humanities, natural science and law but also promoted Polish culture by teaching the Polish language. A Commission on National Education (1773) whose activity was based on all the schools and colleges taken over from the Jesuits when they were abolished, carried out a complete reorganisation of the educational system. Its Catholic character lay in the fact that the system continued to be reformed as it had been initiated by the Pijars⁶. The Polish language was

³ E. Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional and Intellectual Contexts*, Cambridge 1998; P. Riché, *Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare, VI^e-VIII^e*, Paris 1972.

⁴ J.H. Hexter, *The Education of the Aristocracy in the Renaissance*, „The Journal of Modern History”, Volume XXII, March 1950, Number 1; *I Collegi Universitari in Europa tra il XIV e il XVIII secolo*, a cura di D. Maffei e H. de Ridder-Symoens, Milano 1991; E. Paul, *Geschichte der christlichen Erziehung*, t. 2: *Barock und Aufklärung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1995; L. Mokrzecki, *Wokół staropolskiej nauki i oświaty. Gdańsk – Prusy Królewskie – Rzeczpospolita*, Gdańsk 2001; *Mare Balticum – Mare Nostrum. Latin in the Countries of the Baltic Sea (1500-1800)*, ed. by O. Merisalo, R. Sarasti-Wilenius, *Acts of the Helsinki Colloquium 16-21 August 1992*, Helsinki 1992.

⁵ J.C.H. Aveling, *The Jesuits*, London 1981; *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum. 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. by Vincent J. Duminuco, New York 2000; J.W. Donohue, *Jesuits Education. An Essay on the Foundation of its Idea*, New York 1963; G.P. Brizzi, *I Gesuiti e I seminari per la formazione della classe dirigente*, in: *Dall'Isola alla Città i Gesuiti a Bologna*, a cura di G.P. Brizzi, A.M. Mateucci, Bologna 1988; K. Puchowski, *Collegia Nobilium Societatis Jesu: Bildung der politischen Elite in Polen (1746-1773)*, in: *Luther und Melanchthon im Bildungsdenken Mittel- und Osteuropas*, R. Golz, W. Mayrhofer (Hrsg.), Münster 1996; J.W. Donohue, *Jesuit Education. An Essay on the Foundation of its Idea*, New York 1963, p. 8: „Those Constitutions make it very clear that the Society of Jesus is impelled to the work of education from an apostolic motive since it believes that sound schooling can help conduct men to salvation.”; W.V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, St. Louis 1986, p. 26: „Education as a form of the apostolate, in the broad sense that it included preaching and teaching catechism, was part of the origins of the Society”; D. Julia, *Entre universel et local: le collège jésuite à l'époque moderne*, „Paedagogica Historica”, vol. 40, nr 1-2, Special Issue: *Secondary Education: Institutional, Cultural and Social History*, eds. P. Savoie, A. Bruter, W. Frijhoff, Gent 2004; K. Puchowski, *Between „orator christianus” and „orator politicus”. Historical Education and Books in Jesuit Colleges in Poland and Lithuania (1565-1773)*, „Paedagogica Historica”, vol. XXXVII, 2002, Nr 1: *Books and Education. 500 Years of Reading and Learning*, ed. M. del Mar del Pozo Andrés, J. Dekker, F. Simon, W. Urban, Gent 2002.

⁶ A.K. Liebreich, *Piarist Education in the Seventeenth Century*, „Studi Secenteschi” XXVI (1985); XXVII (1986); *L'enseignement classique au XVIII^e siècle. Collèges et universités*, ed. P. Costabel, Paris 1986; P. Vannucci, *Collegio*

introduced as the language of instruction instead of Latin, which was becoming less and less comprehensible to the younger generation. What is more, natural science was also introduced in a wider range by teaching physics, chemistry, geography, physical education and vocational subjects, e.g. agriculture and trade. In schools subordinate to the Commission, the teachers were Catholics and very often members of the clergy, such as Francis Bohomolec SJ, the Reverend Hugo Kołłątaj and the Reverend Stanley Staszic. Furthermore, a lot of ordinary schools for village and middle-class children were established at that time. Worth mentioning is the fact that girls were allowed to learn there.

In the year 1795, after the third partition, Poland wasn't an independent country any more and the main problem was to preserve its national identity. The majority of duties regarding the education of Poles had to be taken over by the Catholic Church. These are some of the aspects of educational activities which were introduced; secret teaching, maintaining the Christian spirit among people being repressed during the annexation by Russia and Prussia while fighting for national identity during the *Kulturkampf* of Otto Bismarck, organising libraries and public reading rooms, forming banks, market places, teaching in a positive spirit and fighting against illiteracy. In the year 1857, in Italy, the Reverend John Bosco initiated the Association of St Francis De Sales where Polish children were taught in the Catholic spirit⁷.

After regaining independence in 1918, and with the establishment of the Polish borders, Catholic education dynamically started to develop. Many boarding schools were run by monasteries and convents, diocesan clergy and "Catholic Action". When the Minister of Religion and Enlightenment, Janusz Jędrzejewicz, carried out his reforms, on the basis of the Acts of Parliament of 1932 and 1933, Catholic primary, secondary and vocational schools were established. What is even more important is that they were working on the strength of their own status.

The so-called *Jędrzejewiczowska reforms* introduced; primary schools, a seven year programme (the last class was for those students who were not carrying on with their education), grammar schools lasting four years (with a "small" matriculation exam at the end), secondary schools lasting two years (more elitist ones, with the full matriculation programme at the end) and also vocational schools and teacher-training secondary schools lasting three years (instead of teacher-training seminaries).

During the interwar period clerical seminaries were preparing youngsters for the clergy. One of the oldest seminaries is the one in Pelplin (Collegium Marianum) which was established in the

Nazareno, Roma 1930; A. Tanturri, *Gli Scolopi nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia in età moderna*, „Archivum Scholarum Piarum, Annus XXV – N. 50, Romae 2001, s. 123-134.

⁷ K. Misiaszek, *System wychowawczy św. Jana Bosko w wychowaniu szkolnym*, w: *Wychowanie wobec zachodzących przemian*, red. K. Franczak, J. Niewęglowski, Warszawa 1996, s. 256-268; tenże, *Postawy wychowawcze*, w: *Wychowanie chrześcijańskie w duchu św. Jana Bosko*, red. M. Majewski, Kraków 1988, s. 113-126.

year 1836, having the character of a private grammar school with the full rights of a state grammar school. The period of World War II restricted the activity of Polish and Catholic education. Despite the restrictions education was carried out in a form of so-called *secret teaching sets*. Even when the war finished, learning was still made difficult for Poles. Only a few schools were formally working and the ones left by the communist government had to face a lot of serious financial problems. Although in 1937, in Gdynia, the Jesuit Secondary School was established, it was only allowed to work till the year 1947. The same thing happened to the first Catholic institution in Gdynia – The Girls' Grammar School of the Ursuline Sisters (1931-1962).

From 1948-1989, for ideological reasons, Catholic schools became inconvenient for the government which was doing its best to close those schools. What is more, religious education was completely forbidden at that time. Church activities concentrated on churches and places for teaching the faith.

A lot of Catholic schools together with KUL (the Catholic University of Lublin) were strongly discriminated against. After political and social transformation in the year 1989, Poland entered a new period of free Catholic education on all levels⁸. Even more favourable conditions appeared after the year 1991 (*the Educational System Act of September 7th, 1991*)⁹. A lot of non-public schools, and also Catholic ones were established thanks to this act. They have been extremely popular with young people since then. Despite various difficulties and sacrifices made by parents, more and more of them want their children to attend these schools.

In the Archdiocese of Gdańsk, in the school year 2007/2008, there are eighteen Catholic educational institutions, without counting kindergartens¹⁰. There are more than two thousand five hundred pupils in these schools: St. John Baptiste de la Salle – Primary, Secondary and Grammar School in Gdańsk, John Paul II – the Catholic Secondary and Grammar School in Gdynia, St. Stanisław Kostka – the Jesuit Secondary and Grammar School in Gdynia, St. Kazimierz – Primary and Grammar School in Gdańsk, St. John Bosco – the Salesian Secondary and Grammar School in Rumia, The Salesian's Public Primary School of the Holy Family in Rumia, Blessed Alice Kotowska – the Primary School of the Sisters of the Resurrection in Wejherowo, St. Francis of Assisi Parish Primary and Grammar School in Żukowo, The Catholic Primary School in the Parish of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in Gdynia, the “Catholic Action” Secondary School in Gdańsk, St. Wojciech's Secondary School and Banking Secondary School in Gdańsk Morena and the Catholic Primary School in Pruszcz Gdański.

⁸ W. Cichosz, *Formacyjna rola szkoły katolickiej*, dz. cyt., s. 43.

⁹ Por. A. Maj, *Szkolnictwo katolickie w III RP (1989-2001). Status i rozwój w okresie przemian oświatowych*, Warszawa 2002.

¹⁰ RSK. *Informator adresowy Szkół Katolickich w Polsce*, red. J. Dobrzyńska, Warszawa 2005.

This academic paper shows that Catholic schools have been crucial factors in the history of Polish education since the very beginning. According to research, the number of these schools is still growing. It is worth stressing that the educational plans which are executed there are much wider than in other schools, and they are based on Christian values and a culture that spans the centuries. Not only are pupils taught particular skills but their nature is formed to become mature and close to educational ideals.