

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

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 with contemporary methodological postulates. Taking into consideration three dimensions of human cognition and the attitude towards science, we can distinguish following postulates: *holistic* (genaral), *diachronic* (historical) and *synchronic* (hermeneutic *here and now*).

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

It is worth stressing here that in Ancient Greece the first schools and creating intellectual environment is dated at 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 right beginning of discursive thinking is the activity of the Platonic Academy which existed more than nine hundred years (more or less 387 B.C.-529 A.D.) Its base was in platinum grove by the Kefisos River and it was devoted to a hero Akademos (hence the name). Scientific and teaching activities were held there. These activities were carried out at range of philosophy, politics, mathematics, astronomy, natural science etc. Platonic Academy was a real model for similar institutions of antiquity and modern times.

More visible beginning of educating in Poland took place while Wladyslaw Herman was living (1079-1102), when church reform was carried out in Rome. Archbishop of Gniezno, Henry, got St Otto to educate Polish priests out of Polish society. St Otto, who had studied in Warzburg, started to bring up Polish priests 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** deserve here our special attention. The actual

heyday of the Catholic education took place in the thirteenth century. There were also established **monastery schools** near monastic congregations and **parish schools** in bigger urban areas. Their main task was to teach doing basic calculations and the rules of Latin grammar. However, monastery schools were better developed ones and we can find there some teaching and educational program. Learning here was divided into two parts: *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectics) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music).

It was extremely significant for Polish education to have Cracow Academy established. It was done by Kazimierz Wielki (the Great) in 1364. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the development and organisation of the Catholic education in Europe was dictated by institutions of Jesus Association (St Ignacy Loyola). Another significant point in the history of education were schools run by the Pijars 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) which activity was based on all the schools and colleges taken over when the Jesuits 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 Pijars. The Polish language was introduced as a language of instruction instead of Latin, which was becoming less and less comprehensible for the younger generation. What is more, also natural science was introduced at a wider range by teaching physics, chemistry, geography, physical education and vocational subjects like agriculture and trade. In schools subordinate to the Commission, teachers were Catholics and very often clerical, such as Francis Bohomolec SJ, the Reverend Hugo Kołłątaj and the Reverend Stanley Staszic. Furthermore, a lot of folk schools for village and middle-class children were established at that time. Worth mentioning is the fact of allowing girls to learn.

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 to educate Poles had to be taken over by the Catholic Church. These are some aspects of educational activities which were introduced; secret teaching, maintaining Christian spirit among people being repressed during the annexation of Russia and Prussia, fighting for national identity during *Kulturkampf* of Otto Bismarc, organising libraries and public reading rooms, forming banks, market places, teaching in positivist spirit and fighting against illiteracy. In the year 1857, In Italy, the Reverend John Bosko initiated the Association of St Francis Salezy where Polish children were taught in the Catholic spirit.

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

So-called *Jędrzejewiczowska reform* introduced; primary schools lasting seven years (the last class was for these students who were not continuing further education), grammar schools lasting four years (with “small” A-level at the end), secondary schools lasting two years (elitist ones, with A-level at the end) and also vocational schools and pedagogical 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 year 1836, having a character of private grammar schools with full rights of state grammar schools though. The period of World War II restricted the activity of Polish education and also the Catholic one. Despite the restrictions educating was carried out in a form of so-called *secret teaching sets*. Even when the war was finished, learning was still made difficult for Poles. Only a few schools were formally working and the ones left by communist government had to face a lot of serious financial problems. Although in 1937, in Gdynia, the Jesuits Secondary School was established, it was allowed to work only till the year 1947. The same thing happened to the first Catholic institution in Gdynia - Girls' Grammar School of the Urszulanki Sisters (1931-1962).

In the years 1948-1989, for ideological reasons, the 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. The Church activities were concentrated round churches and places of catechizing.

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

In Gdańsk Archidiecezja, in the school year 2002/2003, there are seventeen educational Catholic institutions, without counting kindergartens. There are more than two thousand pupils learning in these schools:

- ◆ St John de la Salle Primary and Grammar School in Gdańsk – 440 pupils,
- ◆ John Paul II Public Classical Secondary and Grammar School in Gdynia – 400 pupils,
- ◆ St Stanley Kostka Secondary and Grammar School of the Jesuits in Gdynia – 400 pupils,
- ◆ St Kazimierz Primary and Grammar School in Gdańsk – 300 pupils,
- ◆ St John Bosko Secondary and Grammar School of the Salezians in Rumia – 230 pupils,
- ◆ Blessed Alice Kotowska Primary School of the Zmartwychwstanki Sisters in Wejherowo – 90 pupils,
- ◆ St Francis of Assisi Parish Primary and Grammar School in Żukowo – 90 pupils,
- ◆ The Catholic Primary School in Virgin Mary Parish in Gdynia – 60 pupils,
- ◆ The Catholic Action Secondary School in Gdańsk – 50 pupils,
- ◆ St Wojciech Secondary School and Banking Secondary School in Gdańsk Morena – 50 pupils.

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