

Zbigniew Marek, *Religion – Help or Danger for the Education*, WAM, Cracow 2014, pp. 199 ff.

What is the place and role of religion in education? This question becomes multidimensionally stronger in many occasions, places and times. The discussion and exchange of views are held also by pedagogues, who care about closer examination of the problematic aspects of bringing up, educating and an integral development of the younger generation. The latest publication of professor Zbigniew Marek *Religion – help or danger for the education?*, published by the Cracovian publishing house WAM, fits complementarily in this discourse.

In the preface of this book professor, Andrzej M. de Tchorzewski encourages all those, who

take on with a sense of personal responsibility the task of teaching religion and who at the same time are consciously responsible for the process of teaching religion at school as well as those, who prepare themselves for the catechetical work at schools – the theology, catechetics and pedagogy students. It (this publication) can help the first group to better understand the complicated educational processes, which are currently accompanied by an incredible superficiality, and it can help the second group by capturing the essence, meaning and place of religious cognition, which doesn't exclude natural cognition in the current education system (p. 10).

Thus it should be supposed that the lecture of the proposed elaboration will open to the readers a wider perspective of adopting the religious interpretation of the surrounding reality, including the educational processes.

The discussed publication consists of five chapters. The author starts with a description of the areas that are fundamental for the undertaken issue, the title of the first chapter therefore is: *Transcendence and the human being*. The activity responsible for the (own and others') education of a human being, which is being undertaken, not without significance has the understanding and seeking the answer of the questions: who is a human

being, what is the sense of his existence or the questions applying to the problems of human existence or the surrounding world. Given such reality, a human being can find the answer in the interpretation of volitive-cognitive scopes which escape him by searching for connections between religion and functioning of a human being and his aspirations for achieving maturity. In the search for the answer the author assumes – as he emphasises – “the existence of an intouchable and indisputable difference and border between God and man” (p. 16). Such an approach will allow to accept with humility and at the same time to search courageously and openly for place and reference for the world of transcendence in the world of matter and experience. Thus, the explanations undertaken around questions such as human nature, human personhood, religion and religiosity as well as Christian religion oscillate around the quoted authors, who adopted the principle of interpreting God revealing himself to the human. Nevertheless, the author didn’t leave out those, for whom “God purportedly restricts the human” (p. 47). Hence, the question, whether faith in God extends or restricts human cognition abilities, remains important. So this issue as formulated creates another question, if this education contains a possibility to use the revealed religion in the search for answers to the bothering questions and doubts of the modern man.

The second chapter is dedicated to describe the place of religion in the educational actions. The title *Religion in the pedagogical reflection* leads to acknowledging, paralelly to the natural-empirical cognition, the religious cognition. The author invokes *inter alia* Pope John Paul II’s statement in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*,

There are also other ways of cognition, which exceed the abilities of the cognition available to the intellect. This cognition refers to the authority of God and His revelation. We speak then about religious cognition, inspired by the religion accepted by a man (p. 50).

Thus, in this perspective makes a place for the religious dimension in the pedagogical reflection. A special place in the exchange of the interpretation of educational reality will be taken both by catechetics and pedagogy of religion. Without trying to explain the differences or similarities between these two scientific disciplines, it must be definitely emphasised that both of them create

an area for accepting religious scientific thought and its inclination towards the educational activity.

The third chapter *Education open to Transcendence* is meant to convince the reader of the need and role religion can fulfill in the education process.

Religious reality is able to give the man a motivation to his activity, including also educational activity. Those who strive to achieve the goals set out for education, can find their characteristic feature in religion. For these reasons religion appears not only as a strength that unifies peoples' ambitions and gives them a purpose but also a strength that exceeds the reality available to man (p. 67).

In this context the author highlights at first the relation between education and religion. He means that "peoples' pursuit of learning the truth explains the significance of the presence of religion in the educational processes" (p. 69). On this ground he continues to refer to sources of the religious education as well as of the anthropological and theological grounds of religious education. It appears that such a highlighted situation of the undertaken questions doesn't restrict or close human abilities of cognition and of interpreting the surrounding reality. Instead, it allows people to accept or at least to consider more than just the empirical interpretation – building not only on criticism and ignorance but also upon the effort to understand and use capably the sources of faith and religious beliefs as they are understood by the surrounding reality.

The place of religion in education is treated in the fourth chapter. As the author remarks, there are diversified opinions and comments to find in exchanges of views and in the discussions about place and role of religion in the education. They are impacted among other things by the way we understand the transcendence and by the world view of the speaking interlocutors. An interesting procedure in this part of the publication is – in reference to a well known report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century – an attempt to answer the question, what contribution religion can make to the area of the human development. Accepting the validity of the assumption to base the whole educational processes on four pillars, which according to the report include: "learning to know," "learning to do," "learning to live together, learning to live with others" and

“learning to be,” questions that are universally common to the religious area can, when integrated, make an excellent contribution. Among these are e.g. forming moral attitudes combined with education, forming consciousness or forming problematic aspects of values. In this context we should agree with the author, who concludes:

the passed on values consist an important phenomenon. Their universal meaning is emphasised above all by religions. For this reason religions become an alternative for a typically secular educational model by the fact that they consider – more than other dimensions of the culture – a whole human being. For religion comprehends all dimensions of the human life and that in an area that exceeds the borders of time (p. 103).

In this part of the publication there is a paragraph that deserves separate attention, that paragraph is *Religion in educational practice*. The author remarks that ignoring (often or accidentally – we can ask?) the role, which can and should be fulfilled by religion, is a characteristic feature of modern education. Such an attitude carries misunderstandings involving connections between religion and education. On this background there are being quoted and described some statements of the pupils from one of the Cracovian high schools. Directing the readers to get to know their analyses, I will quote here the author’s recapitulation:

The quoted examples and their explanations seem to confirm the thesis that a correctly led religious education (catechesis, religious education) enriches the school education not only with knowledge. It contributes also to the development of the personality and to achieving human and religious maturity. Therefore a value of the religious education is not only extending knowledge but also providing it with new substantiations. Also significant is the fact, that through religious education a man gets new impulses leading to the development and enrichment of his personality (p. 153).

The last – fifth chapter was called *Religion and education*. It should be accepted (perhaps except few cases) that modern reflection on educations focuses on the possibilities of an effective support to the growth and development of a person as well as of preparing and introducing the alumni into a peaceful social life. The author dwells in this part above all on indicating the place of the Catholic Church in promoting the humanistic formation of

the man. At the same time he indicates the points of contact between education (natural) and religious education (Christian). Moreover, he assumes that religious education through its cognition area widens man's possibilities of perceiving himself and the surrounding world. An argument in favour of this is opening to the deepest abilities of a person, including the ability of cognition, loving, being free or living without limits (immortality); overcoming one's own alienation, which is possible in God, who offers to the man His friendship and love for the whole eternity; finding oneself, that is to say, discovering one's own destiny to succeed i.e. living with God in full luck and endless love (pp. 160-161).

An interesting complement to the process of teaching and educating a human being is that the author of this publication is bringing closer the Ignatian pedagogy as a model of religious education. The assumptions and aims of the Ignatian pedagogy were proposed in the 1980's and 1990's by specialists, who worked in the educational system in the school system directed by the Jesuit order. The elaborated education model has been based on the fundamental dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* written by the founder of the Jesuit order, Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It is worth noting that this pedagogy tends to form a person in intellectual and moral dimension. However, it is not about suggesting an program of indoctrination that would restrict and suppress the human spirit. It is mainly about to make the running in stages educational processes support achieving by the alumni the full maturity. Let us also add – quoting the author of this publication – that “the factor in the Ignatian pedagogy that integrates the wholeness of the undertaken educational processes consists the religious and spiritual formation” (p. 167). Moreover, in the proposed Ignatian pedagogy “when followed, this reflection helps form in the alumni the consciousness and beliefs as well as the right approach towards values and life attitudes. It assumes giving help in teaching of thinking, an effect of which will be the actions based on free choice” (p. 171).

The researches of Zbigniew Marek concentrate upon education and religion as they connect with these main concepts and with reality. They do not comprise a blanket analysis of issues and explanations, which the author does not expect. Though, it has to be admitted that the elaboration creates a basis to increase the attention for the subject of cognition, which not is not for all so obvious. However, the objective view of the author

Honouring Holy Scriptures

demonstrates his extensive knowledge not only in the area of theology and catechetics but also in the area of pedagogy. At the same time, in expressing the content in a suggestive way, as a result of his profession, he may inspire to further immersions and searches for the sources of the human life and to become creatively active, including also the pedagogical field. All the more, as Professor Zbigniew Marek summarizes:

Religion (Christianity) does not claim a right to explain all matters of interest to the human being. Its task is only to explain the broadly understood human existence, examined in the context of the relations connecting man with God. This means that religion explains only this aspect of the human life, which is not possible to be explained by reason. Also in these contexts we should search for and formulate the answer to the question: for education – is religion rather a help or a danger, and maybe a partner, whose presence serves the good and the development of a person (p. 175).

Janusz Mółka

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow
Institute of Education Sciences