

# Education - the way to human and spiritual maturity



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The presented paper is a reflection on education, especially Christian education, on its particularities but also risks, on our own fears from this education and sometimes, from our own helplessness when confronted with obstacles.

The education process is a complex interaction process. From the part of the teacher or educator, it is a target-oriented and conscious acting on the child, but at the same time, it is the acceptance or non-acceptance of this acting from the part of the child on the educator. Let us remember how we can be made happy when we see the positive results of our actions. On the other hand, you are not just not pleased but also enraged or express resignation, when a child refuses to be formed, when you see no results or the child is consciously negating your acting.

Dr. Matejí ek said that **it is never too early for education**. This means that a child – we will use this term for all age groups of children in your care, pupils, teenagers, students... - we meet with

and which is entrusted into your care, is already influenced by a certain education provided by its family. Moreover, each child is unique, each is inhabited by a secret not even the parents know of.

Each human life is a gift which helps a person to discover others. It is a precious gift, as our Lord only creates good things and precious things, His hands have never produced anything defective. The book of Genesis says: *“And God saw all that He had made and it was very good.”* (Gen, 1,31). But this precious gift, this secret is marked by a sinful nature, by wounds, by inheritance... That it why it is important to see in every child its uniqueness and approach it carefully, with honour and awe to what is hidden inside it.

If we consider the **goal and mission** of education, it is not just some mechanical forwarding of information or moralizing and admonition. Christian education does not strive to just moralize or to insert some form of religious subtext into everything.

It is not an ideology like a political system. You may know the old joke, where the old religion teacher asks children: "What is it? It is small, brown and climbs trees: Johnny says: Normally, I would say it is a squirrel. But as it is you who is asking, it must be the baby Jesus..."

By Christian education, we must keep in mind that we are educating God's children. One of the most beautiful and almost amazing aspects of Christian education is that you have a child in your hands that is a child of God and you may influence and form the most precious of God's gifts, the gift of life, that in front of you, a new person blooms. It means **discovering the acts of God in a child and opening the child to this acting**. We do not educate solely by what we say but also by who we are, how we live, what our lifestyle is, which values we support. The most significant education influence do not have our words but that with which our heart is filled, because *„for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of“*. (Mt, 12.34)

In the development of a person, two specific periods may be observed:

**1. Heteronomous period** – it is the stage of the pre-school age, when the habits of a child form. In this period, it is advisable the child be surrounded by positive examples so that it would not only hear what it must or must not do but so that it would also see how adults live, even in moments when the adults do not know they are being watched. An authentic life according to Christian values has the most significant effect on education.

When the child starts to compare its behaviour to that of others, it slowly moves on to the autonomous period.

**2. Autonomous period** – the child reaches this stage, when it is old enough to attend school, when it has already formed a structure of social experience, moral habits. In this period, it slowly starts to become critical and will often evaluate the life and behaviour of those, who educate it. It is not errors and mistakes that are the worst enemies of a positive education. It is a double life, a farce and denial of one's own words that in practice block and even destroy a positive result of education.

A model of real education is Christ Himself and his approach to the education of His disciples. Let us have a look at some principles of His education:

- Christ did not choose as His apostles only ideal people but **He accepted them as they were**. With all of their past, their mistakes but also with their gifts, their character traits and their ideals. He accepted Peter, who was already married and was carrying all of his habits and past; he accepted John, who was a certain ideal of innocence; but he also accepted Jacob and John with their choleric personalities for they were called „the sons of thunder“ (Mk 3, 16); He accepted Judas, who had an exact idea of how the Messiah should look like and what He should do. Christ accepted them with love and formed them with love in the course of three years. When we behold this period of time, we do not see any major result at its end. On the surface, nothing has changed and the apostles remained practically the same as they were in the beginning. But Christ's approach did not show any signs of self-pity – how much time did I sacrifice for them and this is how they pay me back...there was no rage that He had been trying in vain.

- If one of the elementary principles of education is **the principle of gradualism and continuity**, then Christ's education was continuous. He led them step by step, He showed them the true values: who the Messiah really is, why He came to our Earth and He even took away their illusions. He told them that He did not come to free His people from Roman tyranny, which is afraid of posing demands. In reality, only an education which is difficult but poses its demands with love is an education which bears fruit.

Christ told us to talk about these demands, not just via the twelve chosen ones but via all those who decided to follow Him: „Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head“. (Lk 9,58). It is only the truth that builds a man, only education based on the truth forms a personality and gives rise to all which is good and precious in him.

- Christ did not expect His actions to bear **fruit immediately**. It was Him who was the Son of God, who had godly wisdom and had he chosen so, he could have transformed His apostles on the spot, He could have made them different people immediately. But He proceeded step by step, kept explaining over and over the same things with patience (the Bible mentions several times that Jesus told them repeatedly that the Messiah must suffer: Mt, 16,21; Mk 8,31; Lk 22,14,37°; which they did not know and were not able to accept). In the end it seems that they still did not understand that anything, that they were still the same people, who only care about who will be the first in His

Kingdom, who is the highest amongst them – they are interested in the exact opposite. And He is patient. Education must, therefore, be **patient and constant**. It is not measured solely based on external success, by what is seen. In Christian education, space for the Holy Spirit must remain as it is only Him who can transform the heart of man. Looking at the apostles we see that it is only after the Holy Spirit had been sent that everything changed: as if, all of a sudden, they accepted everything and understood it, logically, and they started to bear fruit.

- Christ never **broke the staff** on His disciples, He never gave up on them. After all, God does not give up on us, either. There is an inner **hope** that surpasses visible success and does not allow men to resign. Christ never resigned on the ignorance of the apostles. God never resigned on any man. You can toil away, be giving your best and yet see no result. But what you put into a child, what you give it, will bear fruit at the right time. Each word, said with love, each acceptance, each tender gesture remains stored in the heart of the child. Even if it should forget, there might come a time in life when it will not have anything else left to support it but this word, this tender stance will appear in its mind and save it. This is what we should hope in, as each love will bear fruit at the right time.
- But Christ's education was not only a tender and loving education, as He had His demands. It was a **difficult education**. Christ confronted them with their own weakness and inability, with their lack of faith. (Mt 8,23; Mt 14,22;



Mk 9,14). He did not do it only to make them suffer or to make them see how incapable they are. He wanted the apostles to see that they still needed a lot to learn, that they are not the masters of life, that not all things in life are easy, that there are situations when we must acknowledge our own weakness and helplessness. It is the exact opposite of that which today's society offers, especially television advertising, where anything can be arranged immediately and without any problems, where there are no obstacles and man is pictured as the ultimate overlord. And so not even the educator is supposed to clear the way for his children, to remove all obstacles, but he teaches them to surpass them. He is the one who teaches a child that not everything is easy and fast, that it cannot have all it wants, but that it does not mean that our life will not be happy or that it will even be pointless.

V. E. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, called our century the century of pointlessness. Man seeks only his happiness but happiness cannot be the point of human life. Happiness is a part of our life, but it is also a part of our fights, a part of surrendering of many illusions. Happiness goes hand in hand with the quest for the meaning of a situation we find ourselves in. If, according to his age, a child can learn this, it will grow up into a frustrated human being, who is not satisfied with life and accuses everyone and everything of being responsible for his lack of happiness.

- Real education thus **gives a child limits**. Even when today, the so-called liberal education is advertised, which says that the child itself knows what is good for it, But a child is not an adult, it does not

know what is good for it, it is not able to judge the consequences of its actions and decisions. A child needs limits, as they give it security. The limits set what it may or may not do, when and where it may do so, where it is safe and secure. When a child has no limits, it feels insecure and must, on its own, try and find how far it can go. For a hyper-active child, this is true for pre-school age, as it is these limits, which teach them to control their hyper-activity, even if only to a small amount and in details. At this age, it is important to maintain a certain order and regularity, even if the child does not understand. Maybe it is not yet able to understand why it may do some things and may not do some others. What is important, though, is that a certain order, a certain hierarchy of values was maintained. Trust is an important factor here: when a child trusts its educator/teacher, when it knows that he loves it, then even if it is with reluctance that it accepts that which it does not understand and does not like, it still does so. If there is love and trust, it will do so in their name.

The setting of limits in the time of puberty is important for the formation of the personality of the young adult. The desire for freedom is a strong counterforce to the acceptance of limits. But it is these limits that give it a sense of security. A teenager wants to be like an adult, he wants to do what he likes and at the same time, he feels very insecure and helpless, and that is why he needs limits to have something to fall back on to. They give him security and safety.

- Education **leads to the truth**. To the truth about oneself, about life adequate to the age of the child. It is not

possible to hide the truth and the consequences of actions and decisions of the child. Sometimes, in the attempt not to confront the child with what it had done, we try hide the truth or we try to solve the issue ourselves. You certainly know the situation when a child is not talking when it does not want to say or hear the truth. Punishing the child is not a solution. It must be confronted with the truth in love and led to so that it could itself give the answer to what it did, why it did it and what led it to do it. When the child tells the truth, when it confesses, it rids itself of stress that had been building up during some actions.

Christ was not afraid to castigate His apprentices when they deserved it. But they were sure that His love towards them would not change, that He will still be their loving Teacher (Mk 9,33; Lk 9,55-56).

We know that it is easier not to wait for the child to say something but to quickly put everything right and move on. It saves time and nerves. But it is in this situation that we lose the chance that itself could move the child forward. It is necessary and desirable to let the child look for answers, for the reasons why they did something, what consequences it has for it and its life itself. And if it is not able to see these consequences, we must show them to it, in a manner appropriate to its age.

When we return to the beginning let us pose the question of which principles Christian education is based on?

- **The principle of stability** – it is not possible to change rules for different situations. This education must follow its goal: **to uncover in the child Gods actions and to open the child to this action.** This goal must be the base for

choosing the appropriate means of education and refuse other.

- **The principle of flexibility** – if we know the goal towards which our education is heading and what it is supposed to achieve, then education becomes more flexible and not rigid, as it reacts to what it necessary in a situation. It is not a fundamentalist keeping with requirements but first and foremost, it is a perception of the individuality and uniqueness of an individual and the right choice of means used to achieve this goal.
- **The principle of difficulty** – it is an education, which has its demands. Coming after these demands leads to the discovery of the great potential hidden inside each child. This multitude of gifts and originality hidden away in all people is, on the other hand, binding and asks for a position of responsibility, which is a mark of trait of an adult. Responsibility means taking ones life if ones own hands, to a degree fit for a particular age, it means not to be afraid to make decisions and take responsibility for their consequences. As out whole life is a process of human and spiritual maturing and the right demands are the right motivation that attracts.
- **The principle of love** – is the other side of the coin of difficulty. The holy apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: *“May everything among you happen in love”* (1 Cor 15,14). It is not a love that would deny truth and reality. It is a love that is true and sincere, which is in the heart of the educator. A love which asks what the best is for the child, what would serve best his growth and how to provide it as easily as possible.



- **The principle of patience** – it is a patient education which does not evaluate itself based on current results. If these are positive, this prevents it from feeling pride, if they are negative, it does not resign and give up. It believes in the future, which includes the **principle of hope**. It believes that all good will bring bear fruit at the right time. As an example, we may use the patient prayer of st. Monica, who had been praying for her son Augustine for many year and did not give up, even when she saw no result. She persisted until the end and saw the fruit of her patience. Our problem often is that we want to see the results right now and we have specific ideas about what these results should be.

What is it, then, that prevents us from such an education; what are its obstacles? We do not wish to talk about the exogenous side and about the external influences that prevent this education. We would rather like to discuss one endogenous area, more precisely the area of fears, which are in all of us and can be discovered in active participation in the education process.

- **Fear of mistakes** we may commit. No single person is unequivocal, we all make mistakes and we will continue making them. To expect to be different, no to make mistakes, means placing demands on oneself that cannot be come after. That is why it is demotivating. Instead of pushing us forward, these demands make every failure make us more insecure and lower our self confidence, the confidence in our own skills and the confidence in the power of God. It is much more potent to accept ones weakness or perhaps

even helplessness and failure (if I get angry, if I can´t manage a situation,...) and ask God for help and His mercy. We need to learn that if we give it our best and at the same time rely on His help, in that moment, God will give me His wisdom and the gift of piece.

- **Fear that we will hurt the child if we are no tender enough.** In the Christian environment, this fear is even better expressed as a fear of not being “good”, “catholic” enough. We become insecure, lose the joy we find in work, as we do that which we feel in our hearts to be right but we still act based on a certain scheme we created for ourselves. If we are guided by the motive of love in education, if all of the education is carried out with love and in love, we need not worry to harm the child. No life is without harm and it is this harm that makes us grow. Most of the time, we do not harm by what we say but how we say it. Christ kept His wounds even after resurrection. But these wounds did not hurt any more, they were signs of his love towards man.
- **Fear of the parents and administration.** It is a fear that makes us consider, whether whose, who in some from see the results of out work are satisfied. This fear shelters the opinion that we live under the supervision of others. How others see us is more important to us than how God sees us. It is not a free way of life, leading to a form of slavery, where we try and come after the demands of others, fulfil them. One quotation says: *“None of us is born into this world to fulfil the expectations of others and neither are they here to fulfil our expectations”*.

• **Fear of losing our job.** It is an authentic fear which may in some respects be a motivation making a person come after his duties. But this fear can surpass a certain limit, it may lead to us meeting all formal demands but lacking any inner motivation. There is not enough energy and power left to enjoy our work as we focus all our attention on keeping our job and preventing any problems from happening.

The basis of each good education process is the love to our profession and the love to a specific child. Even if today, pedagogical work is not sufficiently appreciated – neither financially nor socially – we would like to stress that we have the right to take pride in our work, the work we perform, as it is not an eight-hour job but a full-time employment for a lifetime.

In the end, we would like to end with the words of a part of the apostolic letter to families *Gratissimam sane* (page 20), in which John Paul II says: “*What is involved in raising children?* In answering this question two fundamental truths should be kept in mind: first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfilment through the sincere gift of self. This is true both for the educator and for the one being educated. Education is thus a unique process for which the mutual communion of persons has immense importance. *The educator* is a person who “*begets*” in a spiritual sense. From this point of view, *raising children can be considered a genuine apostolate*. It is a living means of communication, which not only creates a profound relationship between the educator and the one being educated, but also makes

them both sharers in truth and love, that final goal to which everyone is called by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

#### ABSTRACT

Education is a complex process of a target-oriented and conscious acting towards a child. The content of Christian education is enriched by the transcendent. According to John Paul II, education is a special process, involving a large community of people full of great interest. He says that an educator is a person, who “procreates” in a spiritual sense. In this respect, education may be considered the true and original apostolate.

#### STRESZCZENIE

Edukacja jest procesem złożonym z ukierunkowaniem i świadomym działaniem na rzecz dziecka. Treść wychowania chrześcijańskiego jest wzbogacona o transcendencję. Według Jana Pawła II, edukacja to specjalny proces, obejmujący dużą społeczność ludzi mających wielkie zainteresowanie sprawami wiary. Mówi, że wychowawca jest osobą, która prokreuje w sensie duchowym. W związku z tym, edukację można uznać za prawdziwe i oryginalne apostołstwo.

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