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CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS KERYGMATIC FORMATION AND PEACE

WYCHOWANIE CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIE JAKO FORMACJA KERYGMATYCZNA NA RZECZ POKOJU

Streszczenie: Artykuł podejmuje problematykę wychowania chrześcijańskiego w kontekście kerygmatu, podkreślając potrzebę kształtowania chrześcijańskiego sposobu myślenia jako warunku dojrzewania wiary, autentycznego zaangażowania apostolskiego i budowania pokoju. Ukazuje historyczne powiązania ideałów wychowawczych zakorzenionych w kulturze klasycznej Grecji z pedagogiką chrześcijańską. Kerygmat przedstawiony jest jako zasada integrująca wychowanie religijne, mająca istotny wpływ na formowanie tożsamości chrześcijańskiej. W odniesieniu zarówno do ideałów wychowawczych starożytności, jak i współczesnych wyzwań, przywołano Konstytucję UNESCO z 1946 roku i jej założenia edukacyjne. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono kerygmatycznemu nauczaniu papieża Franciszka, ze wskazaniem na jego nowe podejścia duszpasterskie i odnowiony język teologiczny.

Słowa kluczowe: wychowanie chrześcijańskie, kultura klasyczna, kerygmat, mentalność

Abstract: The article explores Christian education in the context of the kerygma, highlighting the need to shape a Christian mindset as a prerequisite for mature faith, authentic apostolic engagement, and the building of peace. It presents the historical connection between educational ideals rooted in classical Greek culture and Christian pedagogy. The kerygma is shown as an integrative principle in religious education, deeply influencing the formation of Christian identity. In light of both the educational ideals of antiquity and contemporary challenges, the article refers to the 1946 UNESCO Constitution and its educational principles. Special attention is given to the kerygmatic teaching of Pope Francis, with an emphasis on his new pastoral approaches and renewed theological language.

Keywords: Christian education, classical culture, kerygma, mentality

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General observations – introduction

As Rev. Prof. Marian Nowak notes, in the free and conscious action of the human being, *thinking* and *acting* are inherently connected (Nowak 1994). Particularly in the context of formation, it is difficult to imagine practical action without clearly formed ideas—ideas that are inextricably linked to the process of upbringing. Maritain insightfully stated that “every pedagogy worships its god” (Nowak 1994, p. 21); no one educates or acts in a value-neutral space devoid of guiding ideas.

When considering Christian upbringing, one must recognise that the kerygma forms the core foundation and organising principle of the Christian faith. As Michał Zborowski explains, “The kerygma in the strict sense is the proclamation of the good news of salvation which God has accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ, with special emphasis on the two events of the paschal mystery: the passion and death, and the resurrection of Jesus” (Zborowski 2019, pp. 261–262). The kerygma thus conveys the core truth of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection in its most concise form, and all principles and values of Christian life are rooted in it. Since ideas and principles are indispensable in any formative process, it follows that the message of Christian faith is inseparably linked to education. As Frąszczak (2012) observes, “no one is born a Christian, but becomes one” – a process that unfolds through the quality and nature of formation. This type of formation can either foster peace among individuals and nations or, conversely, contribute to division and conflict.

The UNESCO Constitution (UNESCO 1945) articulates this interconnection between education and peace by setting out the conditions for an upbringing conducive to peaceful coexistence. Although the Constitution does not directly mention the term, it implicitly points to the need for what we might call a new “peace-oriented mentality”.

A similar concern for the relationship between upbringing and peace is present in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and in the post-conciliar papal magisterium. As Rev. Franciszek Wronowski observes, what is needed is not merely a set of new organisational forms or legal norms, but rather a deepened Christian mentality – one rooted in communion with God through the Church and oriented toward holiness. “It is thus about moving from a shallow and incomplete religiosity to a religiosity of the fullness of Christian life, a religiosity of authentic holiness and a reconstruction of the temporal order in union with Christ” (Wronowski 2001, pp. 155–156). Summarising the post-conciliar teaching of the Church, Wronowski stresses that the most urgent task of pastoral care, apostolate, and education is the formation of a genuine Christian mentality permeated by a spirituality of communion and love.

In this context, it is worth recalling Pope Francis’s teaching, which identifies the kerygma as the essential and foundational Christian message that generates a distinct kerygmatic mentality (Zborowski 2019). He repeatedly underscores the beauty, power, and contemporary necessity of the kerygma, and points out that

all Christian formation is ultimately a deepening of the kerygma (Pope Francis 2013).

Finally, it is also appropriate to consider Christian education in relation to its classical model, elements of which are still vividly present in contemporary practice.

Christian upbringing in the perspective of Ancient Greece

Henri-Irénée Marrou, in his seminal work “History of Education in Antiquity” (Marrou 1969), noted that Christians, in their formative activities conducted in preparation for baptism (catechumenate) or within catechetical schools, adopted the principle that before one was baptised, one had to first mature as a human being. Christianity maintained a positive attitude toward Greek culture by incorporating into Christian upbringing a fundamental premise of Hellenistic humanism: that the human being possesses intrinsic worth prior to any social or ontological qualifications (Marrou 1969).

Moreover, Christian education developed in direct relation to the intellectual legacy of Greek philosophy. The Greeks not only inquired into the essence of things, but they also sought to discover the fundamental laws that govern being, and attempted to live according to these laws. They applied such insights to the organisation of society and, most notably, to the upbringing of children and youth. This educational vision aimed to realise in the human person a timeless and universal ideal of humanity through the development of all aspects of human nature. The principal instrument of such formation – education as the cultivation of human nature – was culture itself (Chłodna 2016).

Understood in this way, both education and culture were expressed in the entire human character: in external behaviour, actions, and internal dispositions. These attitudes were not incidental but the outcome of deliberate educational efforts oriented toward a defined goal. This formative vision, rooted already in Homeric thought and developed further during the Athenian democratic era, conceptualised education (*paideia*) as a cultural process (Chłodna 2016). The ideal of *excellence* was to manifest itself in both the external and internal life of the individual. This ideal was encapsulated in the Greek concept of *arete* – virtue, moral strength, and human excellence. It referred not only to heroic valour or strength but to the full realisation of one’s potential (Chłodna 2016; Jaroszyński 2003).

Importantly, these virtues were not seen as ends in themselves. The ultimate aim of education was the attainment of *kalokagathia* (*kalos* – beauty, *kai* – and, *agathos* – good): the harmonious integration of beauty and goodness as the ideal of human flourishing (Chłodna 2016). Such ideals, although rooted in pre-Christian thought, were not in contradiction with Christian revelation. On the contrary, Christians appropriated the ancient insight that the ultimate goal of culture is the formation of the human person.

However, while Greek antiquity proposed a noble ideal, it lacked a definitive answer to the question of the ultimate purpose and meaning of human life. Classical education posited that human perfection could be achieved through the cultivation of intellectual, moral, and physical faculties. Christianity introduced a radically new anthropology grounded in the kerygma – a vision of the human person as a being who transcends nature and society, created in the image of a personal God who is both transcendent and omnipotent.

In this way, Christian education endowed human life with a supernatural dimension, wherein the ultimate aim is eternal life (Chłodna 2016). Within this theological and anthropological framework, Catholic pedagogy identifies its educational ideal: the desire for happiness, which finds its complete fulfilment in eternal communion with God. It is the kerygma, then, that provides the most reliable foundation for education oriented toward this transcendent ideal (Kostkiewicz 2013).

The integrating power of Christian upbringing – the power of the kerygma

In Christianity, as in every religion concerned with formation, it is possible to distinguish a religious function of upbringing. However, within Christianity, this function acquired an unprecedented educational power. It became integrative – encompassing not only the religious dimension but also the moral and social functions of education, ultimately contributing to the development of European culture, nations, and the rise of schools and universities (Kunowski 2004).

Why did this integration occur specifically within Christianity? If it were solely due to the fact that the human being is by nature a religious creature, then similar developments should have already been evident in earlier civilisations, such as Egypt, Babylonia, or classical Greece during the formation of *paideia* – a tradition that Christianity later adapted in the form of *humanitas* (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1994; Król 2013).

As Stefan Kunowski notes, the integrating power of Christian education – rooted in the foundation of the Loving God-Man who overcomes death – was so profound that until the Reformation, the religious function of education inherently included both moral and social dimensions. While the faith of Israel, based on the Law of the Old Covenant, was also shaped by the idea of a loving God guiding the history of His people, the fear of death and its inescapability limited the transformative power of this religious function. It did not generate the same comprehensive integration seen in Christian formation.

The Reformation, as Kunowski argues, effectively obscured the kerygmatic dimension of Christianity. As a result, the integrative power of religious education began to decline, giving rise to a secular ethic. This shift was perhaps most clearly reflected in the Reformers' approach to the Church and to the Word of God, encapsulated in the principle of *sola scriptura* (Kunowski 2004). In this paradigm,

God was no longer encountered through the incarnate Word in the ecclesial community, but was confined to the written text of Scripture. The transcendent Word – Christ, the Logos – was replaced by the book as the beginning, the content, and the end of revelation. Consequently, the world and history became disenchanted.

As Marshall McLuhan notes in “The Gutenberg Galaxy” (2019), the Reformation was inseparable from the invention of the printing press. It was not merely about improved access to texts, but about a transformation in human cognition: the rise of linear thinking modelled on the arrangement of printed characters. Writing attained a new kind of authority, and the human mind, previously attuned to mystery and embodied encounter, became oriented toward abstract, sequential reasoning. This shift in epistemology detached the human imagination from the beauty of creation, the drama of salvation history, and the sacramental encounter with Christ in the Church, replacing it with the rational mastery of linear logic (McLuhan 2019).

According to Kunowski, this marked the beginning of a crisis in education, which was later deepened by the influence of Kant’s categorical imperative in the formation of moral attitudes. Detached from any particular religious tradition, this secular approach ultimately lacked the transformative power of Christian formation. The catastrophic moral failures of the twentieth century – particularly the two World Wars – tragically confirmed this loss of integrative force (Kunowski 2004).

To fully grasp the integrating power of the kerygma in Christian education, it is crucial to distinguish between religion and faith. The term *religion* (*religio*, from *religare*) denotes “to bind again” (Mazanka 2014; Król 2023). Etymologically and historically, religion arises from the human desire to connect with a higher power, often driven by fear and the instinct for survival. In this bottom-up model, humanity is the originator of religious systems. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “man by his nature and vocation is a religious being” (CCC 1994, p. 25). This religiosity, however, tends to isolate the divine to a sacral sphere, accessed only in moments of danger. Consequently, it cannot permeate the entirety of life with pedagogical force.

This is not the Christian understanding of the divine. Christianity is based not on fear-driven religiosity, but on faith – a gift of God. In Hebrew, faith is expressed by the word *emunah*, meaning “to lean on someone stronger” (Ratzinger 1996, p. 10). Faith arises not from human fear but from God’s self-revelation: first in the history of Israel, and fully in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the very core of the kerygma.

This anticipatory love of God, revealed in the resurrection, is so compelling that it permeates all areas of life. In the context of education, it bestows the religious function with a unique integrative force, no longer rooted in fear but in love (Frąckowiak 2001; Michalski 2011; Bocchi, Ceruti 2004; Król 2013).

As Christian Duquoc observed, we no longer live in a world in which Christian faith and education offer coherence to people's daily lives. Instead, we inhabit a secularised reality in which no religion seems capable of sustaining hope. And yet, such hope persists – offered by faith in the crucified and risen Christ. Only the Word of God that brings hope can make sense of the secular world, human life, and the process of upbringing, providing authentic motives and enduring strength (Duquoc 1975; Cox 1969).

Christian, and especially Catholic, education affirms that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that liberates both the present and the future. The future is not guaranteed by myth, technology, or progress alone—none of which can disclose ultimate meaning (Duquoc 1975; Cox 1969). As Joseph Ratzinger writes, the true power of education lies in its ability to synthesise all functions of formation. In the essential task of passing on a meaningful vision of life, Christianity must not be dismissed (Frąckowiak 2001; Michalski 2011; Bocchi, Ceruti 2004).

UNESCO guidelines on education for peace and the situation of contemporary human lostness

After the tragic events of the Second World War, the need to secure peace for humanity through proper education became urgent. For this reason, five key guidelines were developed to shape an education that would safeguard humanity against war. These are as follows:

1. It was recognised that wars begin in the minds of people. Therefore, peace must also be built by educating minds in the spirit of peace. To this end, the ideas of pacifism, irenicism, and ecumenism were proposed.
2. To prevent war, it is necessary to understand the aspirations and lives of other nations so that distrust and suspicion may be overcome. People must be raised in a spirit of justice, freedom, and peace.
3. Racist doctrines must be abolished, and people should be educated in a spirit of personalism that respects the dignity and equality of all.
4. Humanity must be educated in the spirit of solidarity, mutual support, and care for both physical and spiritual needs.
5. Peace cannot be sustained solely through political or economic mechanisms. It must be based on the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind (Kunowski 2004, pp. 80–81).

These guidelines, though valuable, do not capture our imagination with an attractive ideal in the same way that the ancient Greek vision of the morally beautiful and comprehensively educated human being does. Nor do they inspire hope in the way that the Christian kerygma does. UNESCO's principles, while noble, do not offer the same formative depth as the classical European tradition, in which the educated person could find a meaningful place in the world and nurture

a living hope for a positive and eternal future. Today, such support for formation is urgently needed.

As Julia Kristeva observes, in contrast to the individual of the classical epoch, the modern human is a nomad, living a hotel-like existence, feeling perpetually homeless, indeterminate, unrecognised, anonymous, and alone. Unable to find meaning beyond immediate concerns, the modern person struggles to envision the future or the meaning of life as a whole (Kristeva 1980; Życiński 2008; Rynio 2019).

Thus, it is not only the dangers of war that threaten human peace. Similar concerns have been raised by W. Brezinka and L. Kołakowski in relation to education in a globalised and universal culture. They argued that ideals – educational goals – must be embodied in living persons, as they do not act on their own. From the pedagogical standpoint, this highlights the crucial role of teachers and schools – not only in delivering basic education but also in cultivating shared values and transmitting core ideals to the next generation (Brezinka 2008; Kołakowski 1972).

Communion, unity, peace – a kerygmatic mentality

The word *mentality* (from Latin *mens*, genitive *mentis* – “mind”) refers to the entirety of beliefs, attitudes, views, and modes of thinking characteristic of a social group or individual (Kaczor 2004, p. 21). Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been growing awareness within the Church of the need for a specifically Christian mentality, the source of which is communion with Christ. This mentality is the goal of pastoral and pedagogical action that leads from natural religiosity to the fullness of Christian life – to a mature faith expressed in communion with others, radical love, and neighbourly solidarity.

All the baptised are called to build communion through love. The formation of a mentality of unity and mutual charity depends on this communion. Bishops and presbyters, in particular, have a pedagogical role in shaping this dynamic (John Paul II 1992; Wronowski 2001). Already Paul VI had called Christians to build a civilisation of love, the only lasting foundation for peace and human development. Such a civilisation cannot exist without a mentality shaped by Christian unity and fraternity – a truth repeatedly emphasised by John Paul II (Paul VI 1975; John Paul II 1988).

The formation of a “mentality of communion” is also recognised as a key pedagogical task in contemporary pastoral theology. The development of a mature Christian faith, the renewal of ecclesial life, and the fruits of the new evangelisation initiated by John Paul II all depend on it (Wronowski 2001). Within this context, the parish community, especially through concrete acts of mercy, has a vital educational role to play (John Paul II 2001).

It is worth noting that this strong emphasis on forming a Christian mentality grounded in love and fraternity also realises a fundamental human right

to education, and it contributes to building peace and unity among nations (Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, 1965).

A key novelty introduced by Pope Francis is the explicit link between the formation of such a mentality and the proclamation of the kerygma. Notably, his language reflects a renewed theological sensitivity. In “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, he writes that the kerygma “is the fire of the Spirit, giving itself in the form of languages and making us believe in Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection reveals and communicates to us the infinite mercy of the Father” (Pope Francis 2013, p. 164).

He also states that the kerygma is “a message containing three great truths that we all need to hear repeatedly: God loves you, Christ saves you, and He is alive” (Pope Francis 2019, pp. 111–129). This message is first not in a chronological sense, but in qualitative priority. The Christian formation process is, in essence, a deepening of the kerygma and cannot be replaced by any more “solid” or technical formation (Pope Francis 2013, pp. 164–167).

The internalisation of this message removes fear and doubt about God’s love. It transforms human thinking – reshaping mentality. A visible sign of this transformation is the emergence of social commitment as a fruit of the kerygma: the healing of interpersonal relationships. Francis explicitly notes that “social love makes the kerygma present” (Pope Francis 2013, pp. 177–178). He also stresses the importance of the family as a place where the kerygma must resound, illuminating the path of faith in God’s love.

With respect to the upbringing of the young, Pope Francis affirms that while doctrinal and moral education is necessary, the formation of youth must be, above all, a deepening of the kerygma: an experience of encounter with the crucified and risen Christ, of growth in fraternal love, community life, and service. He calls for the development of new approaches – a language of closeness rather than proselytism, and a way of expressing the kerygma in a form that is accessible to young people (Pope Francis 2019; Pope Francis, 2016).

This way of thinking and living – a kerygmatic mentality – places Jesus Christ and His love at the centre of life. It is, however, challenged by today’s dominant mentality, which promotes a form of humanism that seeks to replace God and undermines Christian identity. Pope Francis warns of “the delusion of worldliness”, recalling Jesus’s prayer: “I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17:15). He speaks of a humanism that “takes the place of the true man, Jesus Christ” and leads to a loss of Christian identity. This mentality, he warns, “does not bring peace, but leads to persecution” (Niedziela.pl 2015).

Christian education is deeply rooted in the truth of the human vocation to eternal life. Formation that remains faithful to this vocation retains its openness to the true, the good, and the beautiful. For this reason, the humanistic ideals developed within classical culture find a place within it.

This article has aimed to present the uniqueness of Christian formation, with the kerygma at its centre. The kerygma is the primary force shaping a complete

Christian mentality – a mentality of love, unity, and communion. From its very roots, the concept of “Christian mentality” is inseparable from the conviction that without such a mentality, and without education directed toward it, there can be no lasting peace in the world. As Pope Francis affirms, the kerygma plays a vital social role by healing interpersonal relationships and building peace.

For this reason, this article has deliberately limited itself to the single overarching concept of mentality, not in order to develop a theoretical construct, but to explore how the Church’s teaching gives this term existential and pedagogical meaning.

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