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EDUCATION AND PEACE IN ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE

EDUKACJA I POKÓJ W KULTURZE ANGLOSASKIEJ

Streszczenie: Edukacja i koncepcja pokoju powinny stanowić spójną całość dla ogółu społeczeństw. Wartości te kształtowane były na przestrzeni dziejów w zależności od kultury, historii kraju i panującej religii. Kultura anglosaska wywodząca się z okresu wczesnego średniowiecza na obszarze Anglii, znacznie wykracza poza omawiany obszar historyczno-społeczny. Dzisiaj, mówiąc o krajach anglosaskich, mamy na myśli kulturę anglo-amerykańską. Wartości nauczania o pokoju są zakorzenione w starej tradycji chrześcijańskiej kształtującej państwowość opartą na wzajemnym zaufaniu pomiędzy ludem i władcami. W okresie wczesnego średniowiecza etyczne fundamenty formowania się państwowości były nie tylko zdeterminowane przez zasady religijne, ale również pewne elementy kultury pogańskiej. Pokój kojarzony z chrześcijaństwem miał znacznie głębszy wymiar i przenikał wiele obszarów życia społecznego, takich jak słowo pisane, naukę i sposób rozwiązywania konfliktów, symbolikę i sztukę. Dorobek tego okresu ewaluował na przestrzeni wieków, pozostawiając bogatą spuściznę historyczną, mającą swój udział w bogactwie kultury anglo-amerykańskiej, również nazywanej kulturą anglosaską.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura anglosaska, edukacja, pokój, tradycja chrześcijańska

Abstract: Education and the value of peace within societies should be synonymous concepts. These values have been shaped throughout history by the culture, history, and prevailing religion of a country. Anglo-Saxon culture, which originated in early medieval England, extends far beyond the historical and social scope of this article. Today, when we discuss Anglo-Saxon countries, we generally mean those that follow Anglo-American culture. The values associated with teaching about peace are rooted in the old Christian tradition, shaping statehood based on mutual trust between the people and rulers. The ethical foundations of state formation in

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the early Middle Ages were determined not only by religious principles but also by certain elements of pagan culture. There was a deeper dimension to the concept of peace associated with Christianity, which permeated many areas of societal life, such as literature, the concept of wisdom and conflict resolution, symbolism, and art. These achievements have evolved over centuries, leaving a rich historical legacy that contributes to the richness of Anglo-American culture also known as Anglo-Saxon culture.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon culture, education, peace, Christian tradition

Introduction

Our world is marked by conflict, hostility, and wars despite the ongoing pursuit of peace, which has become an endless and vital endeavour. Drawing conclusions from a nation's previous historical and social experiences is an indispensable element of every culture. It is impossible to talk about teaching peace today without recalling the experiences of the past. When discussing teaching peace in Anglo-Saxon culture, it is also important to consider the period during which the foundations of today's values were formed.

The Anglo-Saxon era produced two distinct aspects: the historical period from 410-1066 AD, also known as the Dark Ages or early Middle Ages, and a set of values that can guide individuals and societies toward more peaceful human coexistence. The first aspect is associated with heroic battles, the fall of the Roman Empire, a succession of powerful kings from the Wessex Dynasty, and Christianity as the religion unifying the nation in England (Bucholz & Key 2013). The second aspect is the cultural foundation of Anglo-Saxon society based on values such as honour, sacrifice, perseverance, and loyalty to the king, demonstrating that culture is determined by these values (Richter, Saunders & Davis 2015). The Catholic worldview deeply permeated all facets of Anglo-Saxon society, shaping both the structural differentiation and unity within the Christian society (Russell 2005). The core values originating from the Anglo-Saxon tradition that contribute to teaching peace include tolerance of difference, mutual respect, the rights of individuals, and freedom of beliefs (Spring 2017).

The Anglo-Saxon culture extends far beyond the period limited to the Middle Ages. This article explores the ways in which peace is valued, learnt, redefined, and taught in Anglo-Saxon society. It finds its place in the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world as the continuum of fields, harvested from the socio-religious seed planted in the early Middle Ages. Therefore, this article addresses both the historical aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture and its relevance in the present day.

Ethical foundations

The foundation of peace in Anglo-Saxon culture was formed upon a bedrock of ethical values. Concepts such as commitment, devotion, honour, and integrity were highly valued. Nobles and individuals alike were expected to adhere to a moral code that promoted fairness and justice, even though some historical facts contradict this. Christian doctrines and values pervaded everyone's lives in the Middle Ages. There was not one single moral text accepted by all social classes; rather, there was a complex interaction between the Church as the institutionalised moral authority, and various literate and illiterate levels of society (Davis 2011). By gradually introducing Christian values, the culture aimed to create a society where conflicts could be resolved with a sense of righteousness. Cnut, the King of England from 1016, stated in his 1020 law that the Christian principles in ruling the country made up of believers in God and the role of the king are based on these concepts (Harris 2004). However, it should be noted that most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms reverted to paganism for a brief period after the death of their first christened king, King Æthelberht of Kent, which was not without historical and cultural significance. Therefore, to fully understand the Anglo-Saxon foundations of Christianity it is necessary to recognise the overlap with paganism which influenced its development (Hinton, Hamerow & Crawford 2011).

Wisdom, Advice and Education

Wisdom, often associated with older and more experienced members of society, held a respected place in Anglo-Saxon culture. The writings of King Alfred (849-899AD) and their application as Gregory's ascetic handbook established Alfred the spiritual leader responsible for religious supervision and the ongoing spiritual formation of the Anglo-Saxons. These texts demonstrate that Alfred's cultural and educational reform functioned as a programme of spiritual reformation aiming to establish the Anglo-Saxons as a wise Christian nation (Estes 2016). The role of wise men and counsellors was invaluable in Anglo-Saxon culture. Over the centuries, kings and leaders sought the advice of wise men, known as "witan" or counsellors, to make decisions that would lead to harmony rather than discord. For instance, that after the death of King Æthelred, the witan in London, elected a new king, Edmund II, in 1016 (Kemble 1876). The emphasis on seeking advice and valuing the opinion of competent individuals formed the basis for the importance placed on collective well-being, which was viewed as peace and harmony. In contrast to this collective approach, contemporary Anglo-Saxon culture is mainly individualistic, especially when compared to Asian cultures. The thoughts, ideas, and personal freedoms of an individual are considered fundamental rights relevant. In Anglo-Saxon culture the autonomy of the individual is often regarded as more important than what other people perceive as beneficial for that person (Wierzbicka 2009). It is

worth mentioning that at the end of the 19th century the concept of peace within the Anglo-Saxon nations was perceived as a desire of the English and Americans, with the belief that these most powerful nations could be the guarantors of world peace (Trueblood 1893). At this point, one might question the relationship between peace and education. Education helps to develop personal and social identity, respect, tolerance, and the ability to deal with and solve problems. Accordingly, education can facilitate how to approach conflict from the perspective of individual, social and national legacies and help to achieve mutually acceptable reconciliations. The awareness of mistakes resulting from historical and social conditions, and their consequences, such as wars, persecution of people, and lack of religious tolerance, constitute a legacy which should be studied in order to contribute to building world peace. Therefore, teaching history and shaping moral attitudes within the education system not only prove its quality but also serve as a guarantee of a better life for future generations. Considering the development of education in Anglo-Saxon countries from the perspective of cultivating knowledge, human individuality, respect for the rights of the individual and society, and the protection of peace, it is not surprising that British and American universities are world leaders. The Shanghai Rating based on four criteria: quality of education, quality of faculty (including Nobel Prizes and awards in the field), research output and academic performance per capita, typically ranks universities from the Anglo-Saxon world in higher positions (Stanley, Brada & Bienkowski 2012).

The Power of Words

The role of language and rhetoric was well understood by the Anglo-Saxons. Poets and storytellers played a significant role in shaping culture, tradition, and beliefs. The use of persuasive, expressive, descriptive, and even powerful language was not only an art form, but also a means of promoting peace. Stories, aphorisms, morals, proverbs, and art depicting heroism and loyalty aimed to inspire individuals to follow a path of understanding and cooperation. Anglo-Saxon poetry (650-1100AD) was divided into three categories: Pagan, Elegiac and Christian. One of the three Christian poems – The Battle of Brunanburh – written in 937 AD, praised heroism, as the price of freedom and peace (Liuzza 2013). King Æthelstan is portrayed by the poet as the “lord of his people”, the ring-giver, who rewards his warriors for bravery (Atherton 2017). Christian rulers found it challenging yet vital to maintain peace in the country. Although feudal lords had some solutions and a code of conduct which promoted peaceful solutions, helping to maintain or restore the dignity of people involved in disputes, violence, and private wars was popular in the early Middle Ages (Howlett et al. 2023). Today, dispute resolution and mediation are more successful in countries with common law legal systems than in Europe. This is mainly due to the fact that Anglo-Saxon countries have better-developed alternative dispute resolution systems (Nigmatullina 2018).

It is also worth highlighting that low-context language cultures like English, German and the Nordic languages, rely heavily on words and contextual meaning. This contrasts with high-context cultures, where features of communication such as non-verbal expressions, social status and tone of voice, constitute much of the contextual meaning of communication. High-context cultures value the process, whereas low-context cultures focus on results. Knowledge is implied. In high-context cultures, knowledge is often implied within the context, whereas in low-context cultures, communication is perceived as the exchange of information and knowledge does not depend on the context (Chen 2008). Therefore, building peace between high and low-context cultures can be challenging. The power of words used in a low-context culture can be misunderstood in a high-context culture and vice versa.

Hospitality

The concept of hospitality is evident in texts describing Anglo-Saxon missionary work. The host was responsible for their guests when they entered their home. Looking after guests was of great concern to religious men and women (Garver 2011). Literature from the period presents hosts as individuals offering protection, while visitors provided some help or service in return. This relationship may have influenced the modern concept of the Anglo-Saxon approach to refugees, and people seeking shelter and help. However, there are two sides of this coin. On the one hand, Anglo-Saxon countries are involved in various humanitarian aid projects overseas, such as participating in NATO humanitarian relief operations and United Nations humanitarian aid projects. A notable example is the British charity organisation Oxfam, which was founded as an independent entity and focuses on helping the poor combating starvation in 85 countries (Gallois 1996). These organisations, among others, aim not only to improve living conditions but also to promote global peace. On the other hand, the Anglo-Saxon world and Europe seem to rely on immigrants for their workforces. However, European immigration differs from that of the Anglo-Saxon countries. For instance, 46% of immigrants in Canada and 31% in the US and Australia hold a master's degree, whereas those migrating to Europe due to poverty, famine or other challenges have significantly lower rates (Germany 17%, France and Netherlands 22%) (Koopmans 2018). This raises the question of whether the level of education acquired by immigrants depends on the country's policies driven by cultural openness and hospitality, or whether it is influenced more by other social factors. There is also a strong link between peace and hospitality. Civil societies unite different ethnic and cultural groups and individuals across national borders creating a pluralism of thoughts, ideas, and worldviews into a single organism working to build world peace. The principle of hospitality at the state level means welcoming foreigners to enter the country, contribute to its development in different areas and become

part of civil society. Such hospitality extends beyond religious, political, and ethnic boundaries. It connects people and societies and helps to build world peace (Bellamy 2019).

Art and Symbolism

The art of the Anglo-Saxons was rich in symbols. Various images and symbols of the risen Christ aimed to convey distinct aspects of his existence as the Holy One, the Redeemer, the Chosen One and an ordinary person. The lamb symbolising Christ also represented the triumph of God over evil forces, as in the Revelation of St John – Rev. XVII.14 (Godden & Keynes 2008). The lamb as a symbol of Christ represents peace, while the dove stands for peace, innocence and divine inspiration which can bring spiritual victory. The dove also primarily represented the Holy Spirit. The Agnus Dei Pennies of Æthelred II, minted in 1009, feature the Lamb of God on the obverse and the Holy Spirit on the reverse. The political message of this coin was spiritual victory. Therefore, these coins were also worn as amulets to bring peace and prosperity to the holder (Karkov 2011). We can infer that the people of the early Middle Ages accepted a certain integrity between what they believed and how they lived.

Nearly a millennium later, the English poet and writer Sir Edward Herbert Read (1893-1968) observed that our society lacks positive integrity, which he believed could still be found among tribes living in the most remote places on Earth. According to Sir Read, positive integrity means being active in leading a certain lifestyle, feeling relaxed and happy. He claimed that there are two main key concepts of moral education: intimacy and activity. Referring to Plato, Sir Read emphasised the importance of aesthetics in creating harmony and patterns that reflect the natural world (Read 2012). Consequently, he believed that all these positive virtues led to the establishment of world peace. The Italian educator Maria Montessori's attitude to education can be compared with Read's perception of art. She recognised that children have different abilities, learn in different ways, and progress at their own pace. Maria Montessori's goal was to educate for peace by recognising learners' individual abilities and learning styles and by providing a student-centred environment (Carter & Guera 2022). Montessori's ideas and the development of Montessori schools are more popular in the US than in the UK (Curtis 2002). However, a growing number of nurseries and schools in the UK are responding to the needs of parents and students. In 2014, there were approximately 700 Montessori schools and nurseries in the UK (Gaunt 2014). The Montessori schools and pedagogy mentioned here are significant because art and education have been inextricably linked since the beginnings of our society. Art itself would be useless without its spiritual, intellectual, and social message. Similarly, education exists not for its own sake but for the benefit of people and can be considered

one of the best forms of art that serves the development of societies and peace in the world.

The art of the Middle Ages, closely connected with faith, also conveyed the message or concept of fides, meaning mutual trust and loyalty between people and their rulers. This idea was interwoven into the society's understanding of faith and religion. This marks a key difference between the political semantics of the Middle Ages and those of today. In the past, the relationship between the king and his people was personal and based on mutual reliance. Nowadays, political semantics are based on the relationship between a citizen and impersonal law, meaning obedience to „abstract” rules and regulations (Cappa, Christie & Gay 2018).

Conclusion

Anglo-Saxon culture extends far beyond the Middle Ages. However, this period laid the foundation for both material and spiritual works on which not only countries from this cultural circle developed. In the Middle Ages the concept of peace was understood as following Christian values and it evolved both in Anglo-Saxon culture and other parts of the world. Values such as honour, honesty, loyalty, and strong social and family bonds, along with the pursuit of peace on both local and global scales have been and remain characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture.

Every evolution is a journey where sometimes one must go back in order to move further. In other words, for progress to occur, regression is sometimes necessary. Thus, to appreciate the value of peace, a nation must experience war. History tends to repeat itself, and people often forget the importance of building a secure future. Peace education serves as a safeguard, helping societies avoid repeating past mistakes. However, as modern history shows, people succumb to various temptations, with materialism taking precedence over stable development based on clear norms and principles. The concept of 'peace' has evolved over the centuries, both in the linguistic sense and in how it is taught to societies. Therefore, today, when considering the future of younger generations brought up being exposed to humanism, it is crucial to make them aware of subtle changes occurring in the world daily, which revolve around the paramount value of peace.

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