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WOJCIECH CICHOSZ¹

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland

ORCID 0000-0003-0839-2179

JAROSŁAW LISICA²

University of Pedagogical Sciences, Poland

ORCID 0000-0002-4424-837X

ROMAN BUCHTA³

University of Silesia, Poland

ORCID 0000-0001-9984-3910

STANISŁAW DZIEKOŃSKI⁴

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

ORCID 0000-0002-5243-2628

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF HOLISTIC YOUTH DEVELOPMENT. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PEDAGOGY OF HOPE AND TRUST

EDUKACJA RELIGIJNA JAKO FUNDAMENT HOLISTYCZNEGO ROZWOJU
MŁODZIEŻY – PERSPEKTYWA PEDAGOGIKI NADZIEI I ZAUFANIA

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- 1 **Wojciech Cichosz** – Pedagogue, philosopher and theologian; full professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Deals with Christian pedagogy and upbringing, in particular Catholic Education. Author of many books and articles. E-mail address: cichosz@umk.pl.
 - 2 **Jarosław Lisica** – Officer of the State Fire Service, Doctor of Theological Sciences (specializing in general pedagogy and pastoral theology), assistant professor at the School of Social Communication in Gdynia, lecturer at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Author and co-author of national and international publications in the fields of pedagogical and social sciences, Christian education, aretology, and intercultural communication. E-mail address: vixen1983@gmail.com.
 - 3 **Roman Buchta** – Professor of University of Silesia in Katowice; Director of the Catechetical Department of the Katowice Archdiocese. Author of numerous studies on teaching religion at school and parish catechesis. Particular research interests focus on the issues of Christian mystagogy. E-mail address: roman.buchta@us.edu.pl.
 - 4 **Stanisław Dziekoński** – Professor of Social Sciences in the discipline of Pedagogy at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. Author of over 200 scientific publications, director and participant in numerous research projects in the fields of humanities, social sciences, digital technology, and medicine. E-mail address: s.dziekonski@uksw.edu.pl.

Streszczenie: W obliczu wyzwań współczesnego świata młodzi ludzie często zmagają się z poczuciem bezradności i brakiem nadziei. UNICEF wskazuje, że prawie 20% europejskich nastolatków cierpi na zaburzenia psychiczne. W reakcji na te problemy idea pedagogiki nadziei, szczególnie rozwijana w chrześcijańskiej myśli edukacyjnej, zyskuje na znaczeniu. Pedagogika nadziei kładzie nacisk na integralny rozwój jednostki – fizyczny, emocjonalny, społeczny i duchowy – oraz promuje zaufanie, krytyczne myślenie i odporność psychiczną. Artykuł analizuje fundamenty pedagogiki nadziei oraz jej potencjał jako odpowiedzi na potrzeby i wyzwania edukacyjne młodych ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika nadziei, młodzież, zdrowie psychiczne, UNICEF, chrześcijańska edukacja, rozwój osobisty, rezyliencja

Abstract: In the face of the challenges of the modern world, young people often struggle with feelings of helplessness and lack of hope. UNICEF reports that nearly 20% of European teenagers suffer from mental health disorders. In response to these issues, the concept of the pedagogy of hope, particularly developed within Christian educational thought, is gaining significance. The pedagogy of hope emphasizes the integral development of the individual – physical, emotional, social, and spiritual – and promotes trust, critical thinking, and psychological resilience. This article examines the foundations of the pedagogy of hope and its potential as a response to the educational needs and challenges faced by young people.

Keywords: pedagogy of hope, youth, mental health, UNICEF, Christian education, personal development, resilience

1. Introduction

The contemporary world, full of uncertainty and rapid changes, presents young people with a series of challenges related to their personal and social development (Dziekoński, 2009). Often, they face these challenges feeling completely helpless and devoid of hope. UNICEF has prepared an analysis of the mental health situation of children in Europe. According to the report, 19% of boys in Europe aged 15 to 19 suffer from mental health disorders. Among girls, this figure is over 16%. Furthermore, nine million teenagers in Europe (children aged 10–19) live with a mental disorder. Queen Mathilde of Belgium, during the presentation of the document in Brussels, stated, “The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc on young people’s lives. It has also highlighted some factors that threaten our mental health: isolation, family tensions, and loss of income. We must do everything to strengthen and improve our health and social systems to ensure a happy childhood for every child” (UNICEF 2021). Pope Francis also recognized the gravity of the situation; in his Message for the 38th World Youth Day on November 26, 2023, “Rejoice in Hope” (Rom 12:12), he addressed young people with compassion: “I would like to take you by the hand to walk together with you on the path of hope. I would like to talk with you about our joys and hopes, but also about the sorrow and fear in our hearts and about suffering humanity” (Pope Francis 2023).

In the face of these challenges, it becomes essential to adopt a form of pedagogy that not only imparts knowledge but also supports the development of critical thinking, strengthens a sense of agency, and fosters resilience in young people (EuFRES 2024), enabling them to effectively overcome daily difficulties (Buchta 2024). Contemporary pedagogy, especially in the context of Christian educational thought, increasingly emphasizes the importance of education based on trust, hope, and a holistic approach to the human person (Dziekoński, *Wychowanie we współczesnej szkole katolickiej*, 2013). This approach goes beyond purely didactic limitations, integrating the biological, moral, spiritual, and existential aspects of the individual (Lisica 2017b).

The pedagogy of hope, whose concept is gaining increasing recognition, views education as a process that supports harmonious development while simultaneously fostering attitudes of responsibility, creativity, and faith in the future. In the context of Christian anthropology, the human being is understood as both a physical and spiritual entity, endowed with extraordinary dignity connected to the perspective of transcendent life. From this viewpoint, education is an act of faith in the individual's potential and ability to grow in truth and love. The pedagogy of hope, grounded in trust in humanity, responds to the needs of the contemporary world and attempts to answer young people's call for an education that integrates their physical, emotional (Cichosz, Lisica 2019), social, and spiritual development. This article aims to highlight the fundamental principles of the pedagogy of hope and to present the Christian understanding of humanity in relation to the educational challenges of the modern world (not only) for the young.

2. The pedagogy of hope and trust

Although much has already been accomplished in various areas of human life, the human being (Gr. ἄνθρωπος, *anthrōpos*) remains an unfathomable mystery. The life story of individuals, as well as of entire societies, can be described as a struggle between education and catastrophe. It is a continuous inter-generational battle between constant "remaining" and "becoming," between "questioning" and "answering," between personal inner struggle and societal demands (standards and paradigms) (Zellma, Buchta, Cichosz 2022). In the field of pedagogy – which encompasses the entirety of human life (anthropopedagogy: pedagogy, hebagoogy, andragogy, geragogy) – a long-standing assertion is that its primary aim is to organize the process of teaching and learning to facilitate the most complete and comprehensive development of the human person. It is a unique process of leading a person from the state of nature to the world of culture! It is not mere "rearing" (as in raising a child) but "education" (Latin: *educēre* – to lead out, bring forth, guide, accompany, care for). This definition in itself carries an element of hope, which is essential in the field of education. Within this definition, the very essence of education is "encoded"; its principal motive is the hope for the actual realization

of the promise of full and comprehensive development for the student who enters the realm of education. The didactic and educational success of school, therefore, lies in the effective realization of this goal: a graduate should leave convinced that the education he received has liberated and solidified all the values within him necessary for inner growth – values that not only allow him to look confidently towards the future but also act as a constant stimulus to give his life an active, creative, and responsible character. He should be convinced that he has received a certain guarantee for building his life on a foundation of values affirmed by his school and teachers. Only a life that respects such values is creative, complete, and fulfilled. For if, inconceivable as it may be, the fundamental goal of education were not fully realized, education in all its dimensions and intentions would lose significance. We assume, however, that education remains a bearer of hope; it is hope by its very design. Thus, hope in the educational process is primarily tied to achieving the core objective: the most complete and comprehensive development of the student.

Hope is intrinsically linked to pedagogy, as the pedagogy of hope represents a discipline of knowledge and practical reflection on education and upbringing that continually develops and evolves. However, it can also emerge from the foundation of a form of pedagogy of emptiness or hopelessness, serving as a response driven by hope. Oriented towards the future and calling out to (not only) the young, it opens new perspectives for existence and growth. It is filled with hope and optimism, inspiring everyone (not only the young) who is engaged with it (Śliwerski 2017).

Hope is also the foundation of trust – trust in life itself, an acceptance of life, often in spite of various obstacles. Such an understanding of hope can be found in the words of Father Jan Twardowski, who in the second volume of his autobiography writes: “Our human, earthly hopes fail so that we may place our hope in God. From despair to hope may be but a single step. Despair and sadness are serious offenses against hope and love. We face dramas, illnesses, troubles. But it is not these in themselves that cause us to break, to fall. It is sadness and despair that paralyze our strength. I have suffered, and I know that by willpower and hope, all of this can be overcome. I say this even though I do not possess all wisdom. I merely try to go in a direction that seems right to me. I fall, I doubt, I stray, I return. But I love life” (Twardowski 2007). In this passage, there is a crucial moment of reflection on human will and the capacity to transform despair into hope. This idea relates to the Christian concept of hope as a theological virtue (Lisica 2014), which relies on trust in God despite difficulties and moments of doubt. Moral theology suggests that despair and sadness should not be seen solely as natural reactions; on the contrary, they are states that require inner work and an effort towards trusting in God. Since sadness and despair are emotions (Lisica 2017a) that can paralyze educational activities and limit the scope of pedagogy, as Father Jan Twardowski notes, there is a possibility of overcoming them, which is often connected to inner growth, strengthening of will, and finding a renewed sense of purpose in education.

What, then, does it mean to educate through mutual trust? Where can pedagogy find answers to the call (not only) of young people? It seems that, to answer this question accurately, two fundamental truths must not be overlooked: first, that a person is called to live in truth and love; second, that each individual realizes their potential through the selfless gift of themselves. This applies to both those who educate and those who are educated. Education is also a process in which mutual communion between persons is especially expressed. The educator is one who “gives birth” in a spiritual sense. Education, in this view, is based on faith, hope, and love (Jan Paweł II 1994). This is the only path deserving of the name trust! As Father Józef Tischner once said, “Hope is possible where there is a trust in hope, where one entrusts oneself to another. For hope to exist, there must be someone in whom we place it” (Tischner 2000). A pedagogue of hope, then, is one who focuses on individual growth by inspiring hope, overcoming adversity, and fostering attitudes that enable resilience in difficult situations. This educator works to instill in (not only) the young a sense of purpose, faith in the future, and a belief in their own agency, supporting them in overcoming life’s challenging experiences with hope. This concept draws on the legacy of educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), who viewed pedagogy as a tool for liberation and the development of critical thinking (Freire 1994).

Its natural enemy is the antithesis of hope and trust – fear. Thus, Christian pedagogy continually reminds us: Do not be afraid! It is worth noting that in the Bible, these words appear exactly 365 times, as if to remind us every day. From this perspective, a great educational challenge is to awaken hope in young people. As Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, “The one who has hope lives differently; a new life has been given to him” (Benedykt XVI 2007).

In the context of these reflections, it can be clearly stated that education, anthropology, and psychology point to the same reality (Bagrowicz 2000). They concern the human being and their numerous conditions, development potential, and limitations, both internal (*ad intra*) and external (*ad extra*). This is the focus of interest for both pedagogy understood as the science of upbringing (philosophical perspective) and the titular pedagogy that draws on ancient *paideia*, encompassing the entirety of educational efforts.

3. Holistic anthropology in education

In contemporary education, a holistic approach to anthropology seems to prevail. Education highlights both the limitations and potential of the human being, advocating the need to recognize and develop abilities such as: *bios* (biological potential, led by temperament and character), *ethos* (value system), *agos* (educational environments), *logos* (critical and sober thinking), as well as the *fate* of humanity (its inevitability, eschatology) (Cichosz 2020). Since education perceives the person within a broad anthropological context, it begins with the existential “I am” (*sum*

in Latin) and moves toward the dynamic “I become” (*sursum* – upward, higher) (Cichosz 2008).

Stefan Kunowski, a distinguished pedagogue and author of the stratified theory, developed an original layered approach to the educational process, drawing on the pedagogical theories of Wilhelm Flitner and Sergiusz Hessen (Dziackowska 2018). His concept addresses fundamental anthropological components: *bios*, *ethos*, *agos*, *fate*, and *logos*. Referring to the individual elements of Kunowski’s concept, it can be briefly explained as an integration of all undertaken educational activities, with Transcendence at the centre. In analyzing human upbringing, one must recognize the need to develop *bios*, *ethos*, *agos*, and *logos*, while also considering *fate* as a factor shaping the individual and indicating the need for the learner’s co-operation, essential for effective education. These components appear crucial when discussing hope and trust in education (Cichosz, Lisica 2017).

3.1. *Bios* as the force of autonomous development

The most natural and fundamental educational force is *bios* (Gr. βίος, bios – life, state of nature), which is the life impulse for the organism’s autonomous psychological development. This impulse arises from biological inheritance (from parents and ancestors) and is shaped by the biological health status of multiple generations in the genealogy, manifesting as the natural psycho-organic development of each individual. Notably, it operates independently of the individual’s will. It serves as the foundational dynamic force driving the entire educational process (Kunowski 2004), setting what we call human potentiality, as it defines one’s capabilities and establishes the ceiling for personality development (Wilk 2016). Here, temperament plays a vital role (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic), as it is something given to a person, whereas personality is something to be achieved – mature, cohesive, transparent, and congruent. Personality (acquired over a lifetime) is a unique, relatively stable way of thinking, acting, and feeling for each person. It is distinct from temperament (e.g., calmness and composure or explosiveness), which comprises the innate and purely biological traits of an individual. Character, which is associated with moral and ethical behavioral tendencies (e.g., honesty, kindness, or truthfulness), should also be considered in this context. Both temperament and character form essential parts of personality (both fixed and variable elements), which undoubtedly influence the shaping of a cyclical model of religiosity. In this context, the well-known prayer from meetings for those struggling with addiction becomes particularly poignant: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference” (Cichosz 2012, Cichosz 2015, Cichosz 2024).

3.2. *Etos* as a Constitutive Factor in Education

The natural life force of an organism has, for centuries, been shaped by the norms and customs of the society in which an individual is born and raised. Each person's upbringing is influenced by the moral and cultural ethos of a specific social group. By employing various methods – such as coercion, pressure, social opinion, legal sanctions, and control – the *bios* of an individual is molded to foster desirable attitudes (the educational ideal). In pedagogy, these actions are termed *ethos* (Gr. ἦθος, *ethos* – custom, habit, state of culture, and value system). This habituation, achieved through consistent expectations from social groups (family, peer groups, professional communities, school communities), leads to imitation and a sense of duty to align with accepted norms and behaviour. Through *ethos*, a form of social or cultural inheritance takes place in upbringing, which is often more significant for human development than biological inheritance (Kunowski 2004). *Ethos*, or the influence exerted by adult society members on the younger generation through various methods and means (speech, writing, images, media, etc.), facilitates the natural development of children and adolescents in accordance with the moral and ethical norms expected by a given social group. This process socializes the individual, integrating them into society according to the ideals promoted by the group. However, this process can be disrupted if the individual is exposed to environments guided by principles widely regarded as immoral or inconsistent with humanistic ideals (e.g., gangs, certain sub-cultures). To prevent such disruptions, it becomes necessary to engage in ongoing corrective actions (responsive measures) and preventive measures (continuous prevention through information dissemination).

3.3. *Agos* as Educational Guidance

The success of upbringing depends not only on *bios* and *ethos* but also on a third educational force: *agos* (Gr. ἄγωγος, *agos* – guidance, accompaniment). The corrective educational efforts mentioned above, undertaken by experienced educators, are directed towards achieving noble models that enable the student to move closer to the ideal of comprehensive development. The outcome of such actions is the transformation of the student and, consequently, of entire societies. Kunowski defines the force of this moral and intellectual influence of educators as *agos*. Depending on its strength, it becomes possible to encourage students to strive beyond their *bios* impulses and the mediocrity of group *ethos*. In this way, the guidance (*agos*) provided by the educator contributes to the personal development of the student (Kunowski 2004).

3.4. *Los* in the Perspective of Christian Hope

Another factor influencing the educational process is *fate*. This most unpredictable and mysterious element, though immeasurable and unforeseeable, has a decisive impact – through the blows or smiles of fortune – on the life, development, and education of each individual (Kunowski 2004). Therefore, it is essential to consider this factor within educational theory, as various perspectives affirm. Fate, as an Absolute, can be viewed fatalistically (Gr. μοῖρα, *moira*, implacable fate), deterministically (as in *naturum parendo vincitur* – Bacon: “Man can influence his fate by submitting to the laws of nature”), or indeterministically (fate is seen as pure chance, confronting the individual with a constant need to choose, as in J.P. Sartre’s existentialism). These views suggest the predominance of fate over human choices and decisions. However, the Christian perspective offers a different view, where fate is not seen as absolute (Cichosz 2020). In Christian axiology, the foundation of education is sought in the eternal *Logos* and in *anthropologia divina* (divine sonship).

3.5. Toward Encountering the *Logos* – Christian Religious Education

From the Christian perspective, a person’s life path is shaped by freedom, grace, and fate, all encompassed in Divine Providence. This perspective includes elements such as destiny (necessity, compulsion, binding force, inevitability) and irreversibility (death, judgment, sin, and punishment), but also the call to freedom, with the person endowed by the Creator with grace (*vocatio* in Latin). A Christian’s actions should reflect an active stance toward fate, grounded in faith in the power of prayer, a scientific approach to nature, knowledge of societal laws, an understanding of human history, and a conviction in God’s wisdom and glory—all elements encompassed by the *Logos*. In the context of education, the term “encounter” is significant, seen as establishing contact with someone who can guide one’s development, highlight worthy goals, teach the skills needed to face challenges, and serve as a mentor. In the context of faith, this encounter represents a close relationship with the Creator, whose guidance directs one’s attention toward others (Marek 2017).

The stages mentioned above require careful consideration. Omitting any of them disrupts the process of education and leads to undesirable consequences in human development and functioning in all areas of existence. Thus, in education, one can speak of leading a person from *bios* through *ethos*, *agos*, and *los* to the Divine *Logos* (Cichosz 2010). From this perspective, a person does not perceive their existence merely in the static sense of “I am” but rather as a relational and dynamic “upward” movement. This can happen both in the domain of a relationship with transcendence (God) and in the psychosocial domain. Although composed of many elements, a human being is not a “patchwork” of animal and angel. As the most perfect being

in the material world, a human is not a mosaic, a collection of different elements (e.g., matter and form, soul and body), but always an inseparable whole. Furthermore, they enjoy an extraordinary dignity (Dziekoński, 2006), which theology elevates to “Divine sonship” (Rz 8, 16). This greatness and dignity of the human person must be continually understood, protected, developed, and transmitted (both a gift and a task) (Dziekoński, 2021). The outcome of such formation should be the full integration of a young person into social life, resulting in a positively shaped individual who is responsible and engaged in building the community.

4. Christian Pedagogy: Hope and Trust

In Christian anthropological thought and pedagogical perspective, a person is understood as a body-spirit being, forming an integral and harmonious unity (Cichosz 2019). The subject and object of action is always the human being, understood as a person, who, in the process of education, unites the temporal with the supernatural realm. Education and upbringing emerge from the community, take place within the community, and are oriented towards the ultimate goal in eternity. It is worth noting in passing that although the term “education” is considered overarching and closely related in meaning to “upbringing” and “formation,” education is distinctly intended to support the integral development of the person by providing assistance that contributes to forming (altering, enhancing) their abilities or improving their quality. One can thus say that education encompasses all actions that enable “becoming a human-person” through a holistic and comprehensive view of the person (Marek 2017).

In this sense, education, in its anthropological inclination, points to a horizontal primary source, path, and goal, which remains the human person, and to a vertical primary source, path, and goal, which is Transcendence (Dziekoński, 2004). From this perspective, pedagogical self-realization allows individuals – after self-knowledge and self-assessment – to progress through various levels of maturity at each stage of development. It enables not only the description (descriptiveness) and explanation (explanatoriness) of a person’s needs but also the prediction (predictiveness) of possible consequences of decisions and choices. In this context, it is no surprise to hear the words of Saint John Paul II addressed to the youth during the inauguration of his pontificate: “You are the future of the world, you are the hope of the Church. You are my hope!” (Jan Paweł II, 1987). In 1980, Saint John Paul II spoke the following words to young inmates in a Roman prison: “Know that I came to you because I love you and I have trust in you” (Jan Paweł II, 1991). This is the great mystery of Christian pedagogy in response to the call (not only) of the young: to love and to trust!

In summary, Christian anthropological thought perceives the human being as a body-spirit entity, harmonized into an integral unity. The human being, understood as a person, is both the subject and object of educational actions, linking

temporality with the supernatural dimension. Education and upbringing are rooted in the community, occur within it, and serve it, guiding the individual towards the ultimate goal – towards God. Education, encompassing both upbringing and formation, is a process of support that promotes the integral development of a person, allowing them to „become a human-person” in a holistic manner. Furthermore, it is essential to remember that the anthropological inclination of education points to horizontal (human) and vertical (Transcendence) dimensions, which serve simultaneously as its source, path, and goal.

5. Conclusions

The pedagogy of hope is the foundation of the modern approach to education, which envisions a holistic treatment of the individual, taking into account all aspects of their development – from biological, through social and moral, to spiritual. Holistic education, where the young person is viewed as an integrated whole, enables not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the cultivation of skills for finding meaning in life, building self-worth, and developing resilience to life’s challenges. In the face of contemporary challenges, such as social pressure, uncertainty, and rapid changes in the surrounding world, this educational approach seems essential to effectively support (not only) the younger generation.

The fundamental principles of the pedagogy of hope, rooted in trust in humanity and its capacity to grow in values, are deeply aligned with the Christian understanding of human dignity. This approach is based on the conviction that each person possesses an inherent potential to discover their role in the world, develop in harmony with values, and engage in building a community founded on trust and support. Education grounded in hope thus becomes a process that strengthens all dimensions of personality – biological, moral, formative, spiritual, and existential – supporting the holistic development of the individual.

One of the key conclusions drawn from this analysis is the need for an education that not only imparts knowledge but also builds a sense of hope and trust – in oneself, in others, and in the world. This trust forms a foundation that allows young people to fully engage with society and develop resilience in facing challenges. The role of the educator becomes particularly significant here, as they accompany the young person in the developmental process, inspiring critical thinking and conveying values essential for a creative and responsible life. Thus, the educator serves as a guide, supporting the individual on the path to independence and maturity, helping them find the right direction for growth.

Incorporating the dimension of transcendence in the educational process gives it a deeper meaning, allowing young people to discover their role not only on a social level but also on a spiritual one. This approach is crucial for achieving inner integration and balanced development, linking the temporal with the transcendent. The pedagogy of hope thus responds to contemporary educational challenges,

offering a developmental path fully oriented towards the integral formation of the human person. In a world where the need for value-based education is increasingly apparent, the pedagogy of hope provides an inspiring and valuable response, bridging modern challenges with a profound respect for the human person as a body-spirit being.

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