



THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF WORK THROUGHOUT HISTORY AND IN THE LIGHT OF THE TEACHING OF ST. JOHN PAUL II

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Abstract. The article presents views on the educational value of the work of selected teachers and John Paul II, on the basis of his words contained in speeches and homilies delivered during the pilgrimage to Austria in 1983 and Switzerland in 1984. After a thorough analysis of the speeches, it is possible to distinguish six elements in the educational value of work that our Saint draws attention to: work testifies to the dignity of man and their value, work unites, teaches solidarity, is the meaning of human life, is a source of social justice, it is an element of building a new world.

WYCHOWAWCZA WARTOŚĆ PRACY NA PRZESTRZENI DZIEJÓW ORAZ W ŚWIETLE NAUCZANIA ŚW. JANA PAWŁA II

Słowa kluczowe: praca, wartość, wychowanie

Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono poglądy na temat wychowawczej wartości pracy wybranych pedagogów oraz Jana Pawła II na podstawie jego słów zawartych w przemówieniach i homiliach wygłoszonych w czasie pielgrzymki do Austrii w 1983 roku i Szwajcarii w 1984 roku. Po wnikliwej analizie przemówień można w wychowawczej wartości pracy wyodrębnić sześć elementów, na które zwraca uwagę nasz Święty: praca świadczy o godności człowieka i jego wartości, praca jednoczy, uczy solidarności, jest sensem ludzkiego życia, jest źródłem sprawiedliwości społecznej, jest elementem budowy nowego świata.

Introduction

The pedagogical aspects of thinking about work are rooted in philosophical and world-view assumptions. They form the basis for the formulation of goals, educational ideals and personal models characteristic of systems of upbringing in which a special place is assigned to work. Of interest from a pedagogical point of view is the view of work contained in the teaching of John Paul II. Work is a reality that surrounds and defines man from all sides. An essential part of mature life is work, so it is very important to prepare for it in youth. In the *Laborem exercens encyclical*, John Paul II gives the following definition: “work, on the other hand, means every activity which man performs regardless of its nature and circumstances, that is, every activity of man which can and must be considered as work among the whole wealth of activities of which he is capable and disposed by his very nature, by his very humanity” (*Laborem exercens...*).

Upbringing, on the other hand, is a set of procedures aimed at shaping a person physically, morally and mentally and preparing him or her for life in society (*Dictionary...*). In many publications related to the pedagogy of work we can find content related to the educational meaning of work. It is impossible to make a complete synthesis of all statements in one article. The present study does not exhaust the entire subject undertaken. The article will present views on the educational meaning of work of selected pedagogues and John Paul II on the basis of his words contained in speeches and homilies delivered during his pilgrimage to Austria in 1983 and Switzerland in 1984.

The educational value of work throughout history

Views on work and its importance for human education have evolved over the centuries. From the Bible we learn of God’s work at the creation of the world, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gen.1...*), as well as of man’s vocation to rule over the earth, to process and use it skilfully: “Be fruitful and multiply, so that you may populate the earth and make it subject to yourselves; to rule over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air and all the animals that creep on the earth.” (*Gen.1:28...*). Great thinkers, philosophers, educators have continued and extended the reflections on the value and importance of work in human education.

Around 1516, in his work *Utopia*, Thomas Morus described life on an island where happiness reigned. He formulated the postulate that all young people should work in agriculture and then some should choose other professions (Wiatrowski, 2005, p. 23). Jan Amos Comenius, who lived at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (1592–1679), argued that planned upbringing should begin right after a child is born. The first period of upbringing, up to the end of the sixth year, referred to as the “maternal school”, is intended to ensure the child’s proper physical development, to equip him or her with basic moral concepts and to bring about the full development of the juvenile intellect, so that the child, at the age of six, can start elementary school. Above all, during this period, care must be taken to ensure that the child is proficient in the mother tongue and has acquired the basics of elementary education. The elementary school, which was the next level of education, was practical in nature. Based on the ability to read, write and do calculus, the school’s factual programme was intended to provide children with an understanding of their closest and distant environment, to familiarise them with their own country and to facilitate their choice of profession. He held work in particular in high esteem, as he believed that it was the most effective way of activating the child, eliminating boredom, and orienting the child to the diversity of professional work, not least so that passions and inclinations could more easily emerge (Kot 2010, pp. 297–317).

In Poland of the Renaissance, the main propagator of the idea of education through work was Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski. In his treatise *O poprawie Rzeczypospolitej* [“On the improvement of the Republic”], he repeatedly referred to the role of human labour. He believed that children should be introduced to work from an early age, and that its results should be systematically monitored. He was a fervent advocate of instilling in children a love and respect for work, irrespective of their origin and fortune, among other things by teaching them, in accordance with their talents, a specific craft suited to their predispositions, which would enable them to perform their work successfully and with satisfaction in the future (Fryckowski, 1992, p. 108).

The above concepts were particularly close to the activists of the Commission of National Education, including Grzegorz Piramowicz (1735–1801), Antoni Poplawski (1739–1799) and Hugon Kołłątaj (1750–1812), who included in the proposed subject content the ideas of education through work and for work by preparing young people for farm and craft activities.

When analysing the issues of the educational significance of work, the creative contribution to this field of pedagogy of Janusz Korczak (1878–1942) cannot be overlooked. The essential factor of upbringing, according to Korczak, was work. He realised that complex educational problems can only be properly solved when young people themselves are actively involved in solving them. He taught respect for all work equally, both physical and mental, and fostered respect for working people. Almost all self-service work was done by the pupils themselves. Korczak himself also joined in the most commonplace activities, doing the so-called “dirty” work himself. In his “Diary” he wrote: “This is what I am fighting for, so that in the House of Orphans there should be no delicate or coarse work, no clever or stupid work, no clean or dirty work – no work for the ladies and the ordinary rabble. There should be no purely physical or purely mental workers in the Orphanage. (...) Whoever says: Dirty work because it is physical, is lying. It is worse when the hypocrite says: No work brings shame, but they themselves choose only white work, avoid the so-called black work and think they should also avoid black work themselves” (Korczak, 1958, vol. IV, p. 582).

Tadeusz W. Nowacki sees the source of the educational action of work: „in its essence, in labour activities, marked by spiritual and physical effort to achieve the goal, directed towards the realisation of valuable works and in overcoming the resistance of matter, in developing the ability to choose the right means” (Nowacki, 2008, p. 76).

Zygmunt Wiatrowski defines work as an enduring and universal value and “a natural need of man in their various forms of being and development”. It is indispensable in every period and manifestation of human life: “it is through thoughtful and responsible work that man becomes a real man, a man constituting himself and expressing the meaning of his existence and action” (Wiatrowski, 2005, p. 86.) The author notes the necessity of work in every period of life, thus also in childhood.

For more on the educational value of work throughout history, see works by: Stefan M. Kwiatkowski (2012), Ryszard Bera, Joanna Wierzejska (2015), Joanna Szłapińska (2015), Krzysztof Jakubiak (2017), Ryszard Parzęcki (2021) and others.

The introduction of the young generation into the work process is conditioned by three aspects of it, which are contained in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church* (p. 59):

- 1) educative – the work improves the worker themselves, who develops their personality through the activity undertaken,

- 2) social – work serves the material and spiritual needs of others,
- 3) solidarity – the working man enters into relationships with other people and together they overcome difficulties and produce goods, making the earth subject to themselves (Solak 2004, p.43).

The reflections undertaken historically reveal the educational aspects of work, which are twofold in nature. The first relates to education through work, the core of which lies in performing an activity and thus learning about it in an activist process. This way teaches behaviour in the work process, an important element of which is the formation of attitudes characteristic of the process, such as, for example, dutifulness, reliability, responsibility, conscientiousness, perseverance, etc. Another aspect of the educational problem of labour is preparing one for work. It takes place through the process of vocational education, which is preceded by learning in various types of general education schools; i.e., primary schools, gymnasiums, general secondary schools, and then through the content of general, general vocational and vocational education subjects.

The teaching of Saint John Paul II

It seems that work is indispensable in education, it is a necessary part of the proper development of the human being – their physical, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and moral potential. It manifests itself multidimensionally and multifunctionally. It not only produces material goods, but is also essential in human development. Work shapes the will, character, interests, and influences well-being and health. Through it, man learns to live and interact with other people. It plays an enormous role in self-realisation and socialisation, and shapes interpersonal bonds and value systems. The Holy Father John Paul II reveals the new meaning of human work and the new tasks in this area facing man, the family, nations and all humanity, including the Church. Work is the basis for the formation of family life, which is human's natural right and vocation. Work is a condition for the establishment of the family, which demands the means of subsistence acquired through work. Work and industriousness also condition the process of upbringing in the family, since everyone "becomes a man", among other things, through work, and this, in turn, is an essential goal of the whole process of upbringing. The family is at the same time the community that exists thanks to work and at the same time the first internal school of work for each person. In the *Laborem exercens encyclical*, John Paul II emphasises that the educational significance of work begins in the family: "Work and diligence also

condition the whole *process of education* in the family precisely because everyone “becomes a man”, among other things, through work, and this becoming a man signifies precisely the essential aim of the whole process of education. Obviously, two meanings of work come into play here: that which conditions the life and maintenance of the family – and that through which the aims of the family, especially education, are realised” (*Laborem exercens...*).

A careful analysis of the speeches and homilies addressed to the working people of Austria and Switzerland made it possible to identify six elements of the educational significance of work:

1. Work reflects human dignity and worth

Analysing the message contained in the *Laborem Exercens* Encyclical (encyclical on the website given in the bibliography), the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the type of activity performed, but the fact that the one who performs it is a person. The source of the dignity of work must be sought in the subjective dimension. The first basis for the value of work is man themselves – its subject. Man is destined and called to work, but work is “for man” and not man “for work”. Different jobs may have more or less subject value, but each is measured by the measure of the dignity of the human being who performs it. The goal of any work fulfilled by man always remains man themselves. The Holy Father also draws attention to the threats to the proper order of values. In the modern era, from the very beginning of the formation of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work has been threatened by materialist and economic thinking. There is a constant danger of treating human labour as a commodity or an anonymous force needed for production. More and more importance is being attached to the object dimension of work, while its subject dimension remains in the background. There is a confusion and even a reversal of the order set out in the words of Genesis. Man is treated as an instrument of production rather than as its causal subject – its proper author and creator. These thoughts are developed in the *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of International Organisations Vienna, 12 September 1983*¹: “Let me say that I greatly appreciate this invitation to the workplace of so many important institutions the aim of which is the protection and development of life

¹ All speeches quoted in the article are contained in J. Sobiepan, *Jan Paweł II in Austria and Switzerland*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warsaw 1988, pp. 74-77.

in key areas of human activity, such as the peaceful use of nuclear energy, industrial progress, especially in developing countries, trade law, social and human development. In today's world, there is an urgent need to combine efforts to act constructively in diverse and complex areas of human life. Taking this action opens up – to a dimension unprecedented in previous generations – the possibility of doing good or doing evil. Precisely for this reason, the first duty is to cooperate, to exchange experiences, to strive for unanimity by means of common effort and commitment. In the *encyclical Laborem exercens*, I reflected on work in the material sense and in relation to the rich manifestations of the development of modern industry. On the basis of these reflections, it can be said that you are called to discover new ways of studying and shaping the relationship between man and technology.... The great complexity of the subject of your work requires such a level of experience and knowledge that it consumes all your time and all your abilities. Mastering just one discipline that falls within the scope of today's nuclear knowledge is a lifelong task and vocation. There may therefore be a temptation to allow the content and methodology of one discipline to determine entirely our vision of life, the values we accept and the decisions we make. In view of this, it is of the utmost importance that we always take the primacy of the human being as the criterion for judgements and decisions. Man is the subject of all our work and of all our intellectual and scientific disciplines. Man – after God – is the measure and the goal of all our projects that we try to realise in this world. Whether the subject is industrial projects for developing countries, nuclear reactors or programmes for the improvement of society, the human person is always the decisive criterion. Every initiative must be judged in the light of the question – Does it serve the cause of man as a human? Being aware of the potential at our disposal, I can and have to emphasize that your commitment and the effort with which you rightly approach the intellectual, technical, scientific, educational aspects, must always go hand in hand with sensitivity and commitment to the cause of man, created in the image of God and therefore deserving of full dignity and respect. Looking at your work must not only be in terms of your contribution to a project, but also in terms of what it contributes to the cause of all the people of the world. Concern for the common good of your work requires respect for the culture of nations and peoples, with a sense of solidarity among all the peoples of the earth under the guidance of a common Father. The progress of one nation cannot be achieved at the expense of another. Let the thoughts of Saint Francis of Assisi be the bond that binds together people whose spiritual goals are underpinned by sincere

effort and hard work carried out daily by specialists in various fields and disciplines.” The dignity of man and their value reflected by work can also be found in the *Address at the meeting with the world of work of Austria and other countries, Vienna, 12 September 1983*: “Work must be subordinated to human dignity and not to economic profitability (p. 81). The first pages of the Bible, containing the description of the work of creation, are in a sense the gospel of work. Men and women who strive in their daily work to earn their livelihood are rightly convinced that by doing so they are continuing the work of the Creator (p. 82). Dear brothers and sisters of the world of work! Be aware of your dignity and your vocation: you are sons and daughters of God, co-workers with God, who created the world and gave it to man (p. 83).”

2. Work unites

Saint John Paul II, in his *Address at the meeting with the world of work of Austria and other countries, Vienna, 12 September 1983*, draws attention to the unifying nature of work:

“Thus, on Austrian soil, members of many nations meet in friendly coexistence and in working together. This fact makes it possible for different cultures to come into intensive contact with each other, to get to know each other better and to create a fraternal bond between nations. A community of work can be a path to mutual human and spiritual enrichment. Working together in a common workshop should become a help in overcoming possible prejudices against others, in deepening respect and tolerance towards whoever speaks a different language and professes a different faith (p. 79).

In another earlier *speech to the 68th session of the International Labour Organisation, Geneva 15 VI, 1982* we hear:

“Work unites: in its deepest dimensions, the reality of work is the same in all parts of the globe, in all countries and on all continents; among men and women belonging to different races and nations, speaking different languages and representing different cultures; among men and women professing different religions or expressing their attitude to religion and to God in different ways. Behind this multiplicity of forms lies the same reality of work: physical and mental work; agricultural work and industrial work; work in the service sector and research work; the work of the craftsman, the technician and the educator, the artist or the mother at home; in factories, the work of the worker, the work of the technical staff and those who manage the factory. Without blurring the specific differences which remain and which sometimes quite radically differentiate

men and women performing these manifold functions, work-the reality of work-unites everyone in an activity which has the same meaning and the same source. For everyone, work is a necessity, a duty, a task. For each and for all, it is a means of securing life, the lives of their families and their basic values: it is also a pathway to a better future, a pathway to progress, a pathway to hope. In the diversity and universality of its forms, human work unites people, for man seeks in work the fulfilment of his humanity, the fulfilment of the personal vocation proper to him. Work is a sign of unity and solidarity” (p. 362).

3. Work teaches solidarity

The aspect of the unity of labour is closely linked to the aspect of solidarity, as we can see by reading the *speech at the meeting with the world of labour of Austria and other countries, Vienna, 12 September 1983*:

“Work to improve it. Commit your energies to the formation of just and dignified social relations. The aim of labour solidarity must not be victory, triumph or dominion, but help, improvement, agreement” (p. 83).

The speech at the 68th Session of the International Labour Organisation, Geneva 15 VI, 1982: “The problems of work – the problems that have their resonance in so many areas of life and at its levels: individual, family, national and international – have one characteristic that is both a requirement and a programme: it is solidarity (p. 360)”.

4. Work as the meaning of human life

Nowadays, human’s place in the social world is determined, among other things, by their professional activity. It determines a person’s place in the world and social group, and integrates them with the environment in an individual and collective way. At the same time, occupational work and the social relations, as well as formal and informal arrangements arising from it are the easiest way to social integration. The issue of human labour – along with the dignity of the human person – is one of the central themes of the Church’s social teaching and Catholic social teaching (Fel, 2009, p. 63).

During *an address to the 68th session of the International Labour Organisation, Geneva 15 VI, 1982*, the Holy Father taught:

“I wish above all, through you, to pay tribute to human work, whatever its nature and wherever it is performed in the world; tribute to all work and to every man and woman who performs it, making no distinction between its specific characteristics: between “physical” or “mental” work; as well as making

no distinction between its particular characteristics: whether it is creative or re-productive work, whether it is theoretical research that lays the foundations for the work of others, whether it is the work of organising the conditions and structures of work, or whether, finally, it is managerial work or the work of workers carrying out the tasks necessary for the implementation of established programmes. In each of its forms, work deserves special respect, because behind every work there is always a living subject: the human person. This is where work derives its value and dignity from (p. 358)”.

Work not only bears the mark of man, but in work conceived as human activity man discovers the meaning of their existence: in all work conceived as human activity, whatever its concrete nature, whatever the circumstances in which that activity is carried out. Work contains “that fundamental dimension of human existence from which man’s life is built on a daily basis, from which he derives his proper dignity – but in which there is also contained a constant measure of human toil, suffering, as well as injustice, injustice, reaching deep into social life within individual nations and in the international sphere (p. 360)”.

In other words, one must constantly ask whether work serves to realise the meaning of human life. In seeking answers to these questions, within the framework of an analysis of the socio-economic processes as a whole, one cannot overlook the elements and content that constitute the “inside of man”: the development of their knowledge and consciousness. “The bond between work and the meaning of human existence always testifies to the fact that man has not been alienated because of their work, that they have not been enslaved. On the contrary, this bond confirms that work has become an ally of their humanity, that it helps them to live in the truth and freedom that makes it possible to lead a life fully worthy of man (p. 363).” The problem of work is remarkably closely linked to the problem of the meaning of human life. “Thanks to this link, work becomes a problem of a spiritual nature, and indeed it is. This statement in no way detracts from the other aspects of work, aspects – one might say – more easily measurable, to which the various structures and activities of an “external” nature at the level of organisation are linked: on the contrary, the same statement makes it possible to place human work, however it may be performed by man, within man, that is, in the deepest core of their humanity, in that which makes them human, the authentic subject of work. The conviction that there is an essential link between the work of each individual and the general meaning of human existence lies at the heart of the Christian doctrine of work, one might say: at the heart of the “gospel of work” – it permeates, in various ways,

the Church's teaching and activity at every stage of its mission throughout history: "No more work against the worker, but always work in the service of man" (p. 363).

5. Work is a source of social justice

Social justice can be understood as a feature of the political system and legal order, characterised by objectivised and equal criteria for all citizens and social groups in the assessment of rights and duties, merits and faults, requiring impartiality in the functioning of state, administrative, governmental, prosecutorial and law enforcement agencies. The problem of social justice occupies an important place in contemporary currents of Christian social thought and in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, as expressed in the *Address to the 68th Session of the International Labour Organisation, Geneva 15 VI 1982*:

"We have the right and duty to treat man, not in terms of whether he is useful for work, but to treat work in relation to man: to treat work in terms of whether it is useful or not useful for man. We have the right and duty to consider work in terms of man's different needs in the areas of the spirit and the body, to treat man's work in every society and system, in zones or regions where prosperity reigns, and even more so where misery is rampant. We have the right and the duty to treat work in relation to man in this way – and not the other way around – as a fundamental criterion for evaluating progress. For progress is always subject to evaluation and value judgement: the question must be whether the progress in question is sufficiently "human" and at the same time sufficiently "universal", whether it contributes to the elimination of unjust inequalities and to a peaceful future for the world; whether the fundamental rights of every person, every family, every nation are safeguarded at work.

The world of work is the world of all women and all men who, through their activity, seek to respond to the call to make the earth subject to themselves for the good of all. The human need to defend work and to free this work from all ideology, in order to make the true meaning of human activity apparent again, is particularly revealed when one considers the world of work and the solidarity it demands in an international context. In order to build a world of justice and peace, solidarity must overthrow the foundations of hatred, selfishness and injustice, too often elevated to the dignity of ideological principles or the fundamental laws of social life. Within the same community of work, it is necessary to discover the requirements of unity inherent in the nature of work, which takes its strength from the primacy of the human person over things and will be able to create tools

for dialogue and cooperation, allowing the resolution of contradictions without seeking to destroy the opponent (p. 365)”.

6. Work is part of building a new world

Work is an indispensable element in the construction of a new world, a new reality, the development of civilisation. The Holy Father saw this as far back as the 1980s and expressed it in his *Address at the meeting with the youth of Roman Switzerland, Fribourg, 13VI 1984*:

“Dear young people! You see the future of the world in rather dark colours. Unemployment, violence, the threat hanging over humanity caused by the accumulation of weapons of incredible destructive power, the economic imbalance between North and South, the spiritual poverty found in many countries of the consumer society. To you young people I say: do not be overcome by defeatism and fear! The world of tomorrow is you. The future depends on you above all. From us, the older ones, you get a world that may be disappointing, but that world has its miseries and its riches, its values and its anti-values. The extraordinary progress of science and technology is ambivalent. It can serve good and evil. It can save people’s lives and it can destroy them... This, dear young people, is the great world-building in which you must engage. Working with your hands, with your hearts, with your intelligence, with your faith, work together to build a new world in which everyone can truly flourish and live in an atmosphere of security and mutual trust” (pp. 208–209).

Conclusions

Work is indispensable in education; it is a necessary part of the proper development of human beings – their physical, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, moral potential. It thus manifests itself multidimensionally and multifunctionally. It not only produces material goods, but is also essential in human development. Work shapes the will, character, interests, influences well-being and health. Through it, man learns to live and interact with other people. It plays a huge role in self-realisation and socialisation, and shapes interpersonal bonds and value systems. The teaching of the Holy Father John Paul II complements the earlier historical account of the educational role of work in the development of man, society and civilisation. In an era like ours, in which great social and cultural changes sometimes seem to threaten even the most basic moral values, the assimilation and implementation of the presented values of work will

create conditions conducive to the harmonious development of all dimensions of the human personality: physical and spiritual, cultural and social dimensions. Let us at all times be faithful to the words and teachings of our great compatriot.

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