

The teacher's sources of strength in the face of new challenges

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New challenges

The teachers of today face new challenges in educational work. Decades ago we were dealing with the increase of aggressive behavior and the rise of drug addiction, then we were thinking about competition in school and excessive concern for performance, then with the excessive digitization of society and school and easy access to pornography, we were dealing with the issue of sexual abuse and online abuse and issues of legal regulation of this field. Some countries have been dealing with the education of migrant children who have not integrated into new cultural context for decades. Secularized Europe questions the effectiveness of ethical and religious education in schools, where religion is increasingly marginalized and a taboo subject. The reputation of the school and the teaching profession has declined, the nightmare of schools are frequent inspections and lawsuits against teachers and schools. This is related to the decline of basic respect in society and the reduced role of authority. The result is people leaving the teaching profession. Artificial intelligence brings new ethical and didactical questions.

We are devoting our meeting to the issue of the loss of identity of young people and the related gender change. The covert and public agenda of international lobbies on early sexual education, premature sexualization of children is taking place around the world¹. We are thinking about how to talk to young people today about sexuality, because the social environment inundates them prematurely with images and words that they are not yet able to cope with, and that mark them for the rest of their lives. The rector of the Faculty of Arts says that gender theory is not a theory, not a science, not a scientific theory. What is it then? This is the ideology² that persuades many young people to change their gender. Many then regret it because they realize that they made a wrong decision, too quickly, under pressure, misled, based on partial information. Then they want to revert to their biological sex. The consequences are severe and incurable. That is why many lawsuits are already underway in the courts.

1 See one of such documents: WHO Regional Office for Europe and BzGA. Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe. A framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists Federal Centre for Health Education, BzGA. Cologne 2010.

2 This ideology is also included in the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe in 2011, which has a great influence on national policies in the field of education. In this convention, the ideology is explicitly required, so the key terms in it are: "gender equality", "social gender", "promotion and effective implementation of gender equality policy".

Anyone who forces or misleads a young person about their gender identity violates the rights of the child³. Therefore, it is important for teachers to think about this topic in order to protect themselves from the traps that threaten them and for the sake of the young people, so that they will not be abused and manipulated.

How will teachers cope with these tasks? Are these tasks only of a professional nature, or are they also questioning their own values and views of the world?

What can Christian teachers do at this time, especially since they do not always find understanding and support for their work even in the Church? Where do they find meaning, hope and strength to persevere in their profession, perform it happily and successfully?

Holistic personality development

In my book *Educational plan in school*⁴, I dedicate two chapters to the question of what is the holistic development of the students' personality. I think it is very important that Christian teachers insist on fulfilling their mission in the school to help maintain the healthy direction of the public school. With the rise of invasive ideologies in schools, this is especially important. We will now look at what the integral development of the personality can mean and what teachers can do for their own integral development.

Holistic (also gestalt, existential, developmental) psychology introduced the idea that a person must develop holistically. This also means growth from the beginning to the top, to full development. Encouraging the integral development of the personality includes the processes of getting to know, developing one's abilities, learning to cooperate and shaping the personality. The pinnacle of education is the desire for each student to become a mature, independent and fulfilled personality. The human being is malleable, so in the process of education he can develop his personality through developmental stages. Fulfillment is illustrated by the word maturity or "full flowering of man" (Delors, 1996). This is the core of theories of fulfillment or self-realization. The term fulfillment is used by Rogers, Maslow, Adler, White, Alport, Fromm and many others (Maddi, 1996). The term self-actualization was introduced by Kurt Goldstein (1939), who claimed that every organism tends to fully realize its

³ Already in the preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), it is written that a child needs special protection and care due to physical and mental immaturity. No one can make decisions instead of parents, legal guardians of children (Article 3).

⁴ Silvo Šinkovec, *Vzgojni načrt v šoli* (Educational plan in school), 2017, Ljubljana, Jutro

capabilities (search for knowledge, creativity, spiritual insights, creating communities). Rogers (1961) also built his theory of personality on the human tendency to realize his capabilities and become a personality. Maslow (1962) introduced the term self-actualization. His scale of the hierarchy of needs is built from physiological needs (food, water, shelter, warmth), the need for safety (avoidance of pain) to the need for belonging and love (intimacy, connection, identification) and the need for respect (appreciation of oneself and others). According to Maslow, an individual develops from the satisfaction of lower needs to the satisfaction of higher needs, and self-actualization occurs when a person reaches the highest level of development. Musek (2000) sees growth in the fulfillment through values: hedonic, potential, moral and fulfilling values. The latter lead to the peak of human development. These values are, for example, truth, wisdom, beauty, goodness, connection and holiness. A mature person experiences that it is good to be a person, that he can live fully and realize himself, because he can know, work, create, love and belong. A Christian sees himself as God-like, able to receive love and to love. This understanding comes from the revealed Word.

Throughout history, many thoughts have arisen about what fulfills a person. The UNESCO document uses the word 'to be' (learning to be). In this term, we recognize Fromm's (1976) expression "to have or to be". The school should not prepare students only for spending, enjoying, satisfying needs (consumer), working in production, striving for the best results, achieving success, gaining power, because hedonic and potential values do not fulfill the personality. Fulfillment brings a style of life that enables the highest level of development written into human nature.

Personal growth takes place through various areas that develop in harmony with each other. Which areas should the school develop, in which areas does education take place? If we imagine that the human being consists of body and soul (Plato), we expect fulfillment in the development of physical and mental capabilities, with an emphasis on the development of the soul; if we imagine a person to be composed of body, mind and spirit (Ščuka, Kristovič and others), we seek fulfillment in the development of all three dimensions, with an emphasis on the development of the spirit; if we summarize human life into the activity of hands, heart and reason (Pestalozzi), we seek fulfillment in the development of these dimensions with an emphasis on the acquisition of wisdom; if we imagine that a person is composed of body, emotions, reason, behavior, social involvement and creativity (Humphreys), we search fulfillment through the development of the self in all six dimensions. The Biblical view can be expressed in the words of the apostle John: "We have come to know the love that God has for us." (1 Jn 4:16) This is the peak of knowledge and development. There are many authors.

Let's look at two documents. The definition of the UNESCO Commission wants the school to contribute to the development of each student, "to his mental and physical development, emotions, sense of beauty, personal responsibility and spiritual values" (Delors, 1996). The Elementary School Act of the Republic of Slovenia emphasizes "encouraging the harmonious physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, spiritual and social development of the individual" (ZOŠ, 2007, Article 2). From the synthesis of these two documents, we have seven areas of development:

1. Physical development: listening to the wisdom of the body
2. Emotional development: emotional literacy
3. Cognitive development: from knowledge to wisdom
4. Personal responsibility or moral development: from performance to professional ethical community
5. Social development: from the rule of law to communities of respect, trust and cooperation
6. The sense of beauty: from knowing art to experiencing beauty
7. Spiritual development: discovering the sacred

If we want to promote holistic personality development that leads to fulfillment, it is important to include all seven areas in upbringing and education. What the teacher wants to develop in the students, he will also have to observe in himself and do something for personal development in all areas.

The teacher and his/her power

Where can a teacher find the strength to stand firm in his/her profession and be able to stand by young people in their development, including in the development of sexuality, identity and personal integrity. Young people are a precious treasure, and the teaching profession is a priceless gift. At our international meeting, we become even more aware of this gift and exchange our experiences of the teaching profession.

The sources of a teacher's power are different. What would artificial intelligence answer to that? I asked the Copilot program from Chat GPT what it suggests to the Christian teacher where he/she can find sources of strength for his/her work. It proposed the following points:

1. **Prayer and spiritual growth:** Connect with God regularly through prayer and the Bible. Your spiritual growth will affect your ability to lovingly serve your students.

2. **Love and compassion:** A teacher should be full of love and compassion for his/her students. Listen to them, understand their needs and respond to their emotional and spiritual distress.
3. **Role model:** Be a role model for your students. Your words and actions should reflect Christian values. Show with your life how to live according to God's will.
4. **Teaching with love:** It is not only about imparting knowledge, but also about building character. Promote ethical values, respect for others and responsibility.
5. **Working with parents:** Communicate and connect with parents. Work together for the welfare of students. Parents are your partners in education.
6. **Flexibility:** Every student is unique. Adapt your approach to meet different needs and learning styles.
7. **Gratitude:** Be grateful for the opportunity to serve as a teacher. Thank God every day for this role.

This is what Chat GPT wrote to me in mid-May. I asked it the same thing several times, but it gave different answers. Maybe your program will say the same thing, something similar, or even something different. These suggestions are helpful, we agree with each one. At each point, we can reflect on our values, attitudes and way of working and living. Of these offered points, I think the first and last are crucial, because they answer the question of where to get the inner strength to be able to teach lovingly, see each student, understand him, accept him, help him in his personal growth, cooperate with parents, etc. The answer is not only logically formal, but we need our own answer that comes from faith, from the light of the Gospel. Each of us can answer: My prayer and my spiritual growth: use of sacramentals (blessings), sacraments, Holy Mass as the pinnacle of our faith, the word of God, spiritual reading, etc. St. Paul encourages us: "*Pray without ceasing.*" Jesus invites us: "*Ask and it will be given to you! Seek and you shall find! Knock and it will be opened to you!*" (Luke 11, 9).

Seven areas of personal growth

A teacher must grow in all seven areas so that he can pay attention to the development of his students in all areas. Therefore, the teacher learns to listen to the wisdom of his body, to live with his emotions (emotional literacy), he moves from knowledge to wisdom, from concern for performance to concern for the creation of a professional ethical community, he comes to the insight that the rule of law is not an

end in itself, but serves to create communities of respect, trust and cooperation, and moves from information about art to experiencing beauty and discovering sacred.

1. Body: listening to the wisdom of the body

We deal with the body a lot. We care about health, healthy eating, we deal with sports, with appearance, with clothes, with perception, meeting needs, developing motor skills, experiencing pain and death. The body enables quality perception, the creation of superb masterpieces, the pleasure of being, the ability to suffer, etc. All psychic and spiritual life flows through the body. The body is not only for itself, it is closely related to the personality, which is why Humphreys talks about the bodily self. Physical education or sport, recreation, mountaineering, trips to nature, development of manual skills, technical and household skills are related to emotions, thinking, will, creation, experiencing the beautiful, the good, with pain, old age and death, with self-image and meaning, i.e. with a sense of personal fulfillment.

What can we do ourselves in this area? At the Personal Diary seminar, we do a special exercise, a conversation with the body. If we listen to the body, it tells us a lot, and we also tell it something ourselves. Sometimes we have to apologize to him because we are very strict and demanding towards him, because we have unrealistic expectations of him, sometimes we have to thank him because we experienced a lot of beautiful moments in our body. If we do not regulate our relationship with our body, it quickly happens that we uncontrollably buy clothes and food, care excessively about our appearance, get caught up in exercise activities that do not bring joy, and drown in negative emotions due to old injuries. A healthy relationship with your body is an important aspect of living a fulfilled life. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

2. Emotions: emotional literacy

Teachers always inquire about who their students are, what their experiences are, how to get to know their inner world and the world of their families. They would like to understand them. Everyone in turn claims that young people have changed a lot. But today's young people also feel and experience, yearn for the same things as all the children of the past. In order to understand a child's soul and experiences of young persons, teachers also need emotional intelligence. It comes through emotional literacy. Wilks (2001) promotes emotional literacy, which means *“learning to read emotions as we already know how to read words. /.../ Emotional literacy is emotional intelligence in practice. It takes knowledge and the development of skills in practice to really master it. As with learning a foreign language, this will not happen overnight. Any new skill requires practice and patience”*.

An emotionally literate person knows his needs and expectations, feels others around him and develops empathy, which leads to quality relationships; successfully integrates into the community, develops a moral and aesthetic sense. Feeling one's life is like seeing life in color, which brings a sense of a fulfilled life.

I have been conducting workshops on emotions for twenty years, and I know that we are still barefoot in this area. Much more work will be needed to become emotionally literate and empowered to better understand the world of young people. We need to know what young people who want to change their gender experience and what they experience after they have changed their gender. We will notice fear and shame, sadness, guilt and anger, hope and pride. They will be grateful if we talk to them about all their emotions, because through such a conversation they also get to know themselves better, understand themselves and make better decisions. Emotions provide important information for decision making. Therefore, teachers should take care of their own emotional literacy and become emotionally intelligent in order to listen, understand and advise young people more adequately.

3. Reason: from knowledge to wisdom

The summit of the cognitive path is wisdom, which is more than acquired knowledge and learning techniques, more than a method of scientific research, more than critical thinking. Pestalozzi says that the aim of education is the universal raising of the inner powers of human nature towards pure human wisdom (Brühlmeier, 2010). Wisdom is a way of experiencing and understanding the world, when a person chooses the key ones from a multitude of data and organizes and uses them in a meaningful way. A wise person has independent thinking, a healthy philosophy of life. He is not only well-read, knowledgeable or highly educated, but he has true insight, makes independent and meaningful judgments about life. A wise person is in contact with the mystery of being, which is revealed to him, and he experiences joy and happiness, fear and pain, uncertainty and hope. A wise man is fortunate, many are inspired by him.

Teachers must acquire new skills in facing new challenges, also in the field of gender assigning. They need to know what is happening, how common these phenomena are, who are the main actors, what influences young people's decisions to change gender, what are the consequences of changing gender, what happens to young people after surgery and hormone therapy (not only a month after, but a year after that, in three, five, ten and twenty years' time). A teacher who knows the meaning of human existence on earth can more easily face suffering, anxiety, and meaninglessness. It can be a source of inspiration for wisdom for young people when they find themselves in crisis situations and at crossroads.

4. Behavior: from performance to a professional ethical community

An important part of human life is the professional field. We expect success at work. A person is successful when he produces more products, earns a lot, improves the quality of his services, expands the market, gets recognition for his work, etc. All this brings satisfaction, but it is not enough to reach fulfillment. Creativity and professional ethics lead to personal fulfillment.

Creating is an essential part of the self, a component of human nature, and therefore also a path to fulfillment. Therefore, many people find in the professional field an opportunity to develop their creative selves to the top, because the nature of the work allows them to do so. A teacher who has confidence in himself, in his professional work, is not only cut into a performance of tasks, a person who does things right as others tell him, but he does as he feels it is right, does the right things because he sees them precisely, judges rightly and does meaningful action. Creative teachers have their own characters and their own methods of work. They have their own professional identities.

Professional ethical communities are created through the profession. Successful work creates honest and collegial relationships. Some professional groups therefore create their own professional codes of ethics. Clear relationships create conditions for trust, which enable long-term cooperation and smooth and continuous work. This enables a stable income, but in such environments, income is not an end in itself, but becomes a means to create a wider community (family, associations, civil society, culture, religious communities, state). Professional ethical communities support other segments of society through material support, a source of knowledge and skills, and ethical standards. The values of the professional community become part of the wider society with which the work is connected. When a person is able to move from the pursuit of personal gain to concern for the common good, his professional work leads him to personal fulfillment.

5. Society: from the rule of law to a community of respect, trust and cooperation

The human person is not an island, he is a social being. Teachers cannot fulfill their mission alone, but together with others. But who can you count on today, when society is politically, ideologically, socially... polarizing around the world, while at the same time atomizing within individual communities? Who can they trust today, who can they belong to and feel connected to? Even in the Church, there is no unity, but great fragmentation, sometimes even hostility within individual groups. Who within the Church will overthrow the teacher in the future?

In the community we share values. This is how a society of trust, respect and cooperation is built. We are tolerant when we accept people who think differently, we allow them to live differently from us. Respect means that we appreciate a person because he is a person, we feel his value and dignity. Every person, even those who feel, think differently from us. We respect the opinions of others, but we also want respect for our own. Because there is respect, people also cooperate successfully there. Today's society needs people who know how to cooperate.

Tolerance, respect and cooperation are the core values of a society that will survive. A teacher who develops ethical talent will be the most sought after in the future, he will co-create society and experience his own fulfillment.

6. Beauty: from knowing art to experiencing beauty

Mothers do a lot for the physical care and hygiene of children. It is necessary for the body, but the words touch the child's soul. Fairy tales shape children's souls, so they are more important than caring for the body. Words, music, pictures and everything that implores for beauty touch the child's soul. A sense of beauty is formed through the experience of beauty. The aesthetic sense knows how to distinguish good from bad, beautiful from ugly, noble from ignoble, therefore it significantly shapes the personality.

Fojkar Zupančič told us in Kranj (2014) that *"art comes to life, it needs a sensitive recreator who searches for and finds in it something more than just a technically perfect execution. One who immerses himself in it touches eternity in the moment of artistic creation. Then the work of art is more than just a beautiful text and harmony of sounds. It is redundant."*

Activities in which young people experience beauty and have the opportunity to develop creativity are an important part of aesthetic education. Already Jesuit colleges in the seventeenth century cultivated theatrical activity. Theater is not only concerned with explanation, analysis, concepts, theater awakens experience, emotions, a story. Human consciousness, which is narrative, perceives truth through stories, wisdom is revealed through narratives. Dostoyevsky's novels are not a collection of beautiful people and unproblematic stories. All his stories are difficult. Dostoyevsky talks about the complexity, pain and poverty of human life. Through the stories, what a person needs to know and experience in order to live his life more wisely is revealed. That is why his novels are immortal, people will always read them. So it is with all true works of art. Through beauty shines wisdom.

7. Sacred: reconnection

Ošljaj (2004) says that religion is *"the most elementary and most comprehensive expression of man's relationship to the whole, it is practically identical with human life, it is nothing but life itself"*. The key word in researching the religious world is "sacred". Many authors have explored the sacred (R. Otto; M. Eliade, T. Hribar, E. Levinas). Philosopher Tine Hribar strove to write in the Slovenian constitution that life is sacred.

Maslow (1962) introduced in psychology the concept of 'peak experience'. Exploring the experience of the sacred opens the door to the mystic. Mystical experiences change a person, because it is given to him to know what people usually do not see. I am citing some experiences of Ignatius of Loyola from his autobiography (1556). He talks of his experience in Manresa: *"When he sat there, the eyes of his mind began to open. Not that he had any vision, but he was given understanding and knowledge of many things, both spiritual things and things of faith and science. And this with such great enlightenment that everything seemed new to him. /.../ It seemed to him as if he had become a different person and had gained a different mind than he had before."* Ignatius mentions the vision of St. Trinity: *"His mind began to rise as if he saw the most holy Trinity /.../ and he could not hold back his tears."* He was given to see how the world was created: *"Once, with great spiritual joy, a way appeared in his mind, how God created the world."* He also saw *"the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ is present in the Most Holy Sacrament."* Such experiences give more light to the faith.

The word religion comes from the word re-legare, which means 'reconnect' (Ošljaj, 2004). A person connects with something that he lost when he came into the world. During its journey on earth, the soul seeks connection with the Creator. Connecting with the source of life brings trust, a sense of solidity, value and love, joy and peace. Experiencing the good, the beautiful, the true expresses a feeling of connection, fulfillment and harmony.

For a religious person, the fulfillment of life means the attainment of eternal life. *"That we may have eternal life"* (Jn 17, 2-3; Rom 6, 23; Gal 6, 8; Titus 1, 2). Komensky, as a Protestant priest, saw education as *"a means for a reasonable and devoted life to God, which is at the same time a preparation for eternal life after death" and not as an end in itself, because "man has the roots of education, virtues and piety (because for these three sent into the world) in himself"*. According to Christian and other religious traditions, the human person on earth is preparing oneself for life after death. Jesus desires *"that you may be where I am"* (John 17, 24).

The story of poor Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16, 22-25) presents the essential question of our life: *"The poor man died and the angels took him to Abraham's*

bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And when he was in torment in the underworld, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. He called out: ›Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to put the end of his finger in the water and cool my tongue, because I am suffering in this flame.‹ Abraham said to him: ›Child, remember that in life you got your good, and Lazarus likewise bad; now he is comforted here, and you suffer.›”

Conclusion: humanity and holiness

Teachers today cannot compete with digital devices for delivering content. Students today have an endless sea of information at their disposal. In this world, teachers will be able to compete with the machines with their humanity. Already thirty years ago, Federico Mayor (Director General of UNESCO) said that 'a mother's tender hand' is more important than a television or a computer. Teachers will have to realize that with their humanity, with the quality of their personality, they can fulfill their mission in today's world. That is why a teacher's first task is to 'learn to be'. Learning to be a human being, a fulfilled and happy human life. Therefore, teachers will need even more to do everything they can in the field of self-respect, emotional literacy, ethics, aesthetics and holiness. A noble human person brings hope to the world of cold technology and points the way to personal fulfillment.

A human person is a spiritual being, but modern anthropology, psychological and pedagogical, has completely erased spirituality. Anthropology is reduced to 'thought patterns'. Therapists have taken on the role of priests. Religion is no longer relevant. *"We no longer have faith in religion,"* said a lady at one lecture. This is the most accurate diagnosis of the European believer. We still go to mass, we still receive the sacraments and keep the Christian tradition, but we no longer believe that this faith of ours has an influence on our lives, that it has power. Yet, I personally believe that the task of a Christian teacher is to bring holiness to a world without faith. The more the number of students with special needs accumulates, the more unsolvable problems appear, also in connection with gender identity, the more actively we will have to search for causes and solutions for these phenomena also within spirituality.

Where there is holiness, evil must retreat. Light must be brought to the world of darkness, truth to the world of lies, justice to the world of injustice, holiness be brought to the world of evil. Teachers will be effective if they use spiritual means: prayer, blessing, sacraments, care for the souls of the departed, God's Word. Holiness will save the world, including students, parents and teachers. The Lord is near and gives a hand to each of us. Let's embrace this tightly.