



Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this article is to present the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education as an educational system compatible with the American philosophy of contemplative education and to aim at the emergence out of the latter of the vision of a man integrally formed as “men and women for others” including the transcendent / religious dimension of life.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The presented research problem concerns the question of whether the system of the proposed philosophy of contemplative education allows to educate and to form a human who is integral and coherent in spiritual and physical unity in the religious optics. There has been applied the method of critical and comparative analysis as well as the analysis of the reference literature.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: After having initially defined the aim of the study and the fundamental concepts (philosophy of contemplative education) there has been presented the history and the main assumptions of the philosophy of contemplative education from the USA (1974). Then, there has been presented the history of Ignatian spirituality (*contemplativus in actione*) as a source for the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education. The essential part of the argumentation was to present the philosophy of the process of forming the student (*Ratio Studiorum* and the contemporary documents) based on the specific five stages, on which the whole process is based.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The result of this argumentation is a concrete and integral vision of a contemplative man in action who is open “for and to others.”

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: This analysis confirmed the compatibility of the American and the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education as a system that should be included in the educational programs and processes of an integral human being as a being of spiritual and bodily unity based on a contemplative reflection and action. The presented system entirely forms a mature man.

→ **KEYWORDS – PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION, CONTEMPLATIVE EDUCATION, CONTEMPLATIVUS IN ACTIONE, JESUITS**

1. Introduction

Since the dawn of human history there has continued the search for anthropological symbiosis in respect of the mind and the body, intellect and will, reflection and action, the sacred (religion), faith and profane, agnosticism, nihilism, scepticism, secularism, in brief – all that aspires to a proper human development and should guarantee to a man a relatively happy life.

An important role in this phenomenon is played by the educational process, namely education/ formation development of a man from the earliest days of his life. Besides the best school of primary education, namely the parents and the family, there have been created many secondary schools, systems and models of education.

Philosophy of education, since it will be the topic of the present discussion, is engaged in “applied philosophy or to one of any educational philosophies that promote a specific type or vision of education, and/or which examine the definition, goals and meaning of education.” At the same time, it should be noted that the philosophy of education “As an academic field is the philosophical study of education and its problems... its central subject matter is education, and its methods are those of philosophy” (Noddings, 1995).

However, the philosophy of education is not pedagogy or psychology of human development. It is a branch of philosophy which does not relate to practical knowledge, or to knowledge as such, but it is rather an updating of the issues related to all that we believe in, to all that we have right to and what we know in a theoretical sense (Reboul, 1971).

Undoubtedly, philosophy of education is also involved in the educational process that uses metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, that affects the issues of educational policy, teaching process, upbringing and education. It all happens through theoretical reflection on education.

2. Philosophy of Contemplative Education

One of the philosophical systems of education is contemplative education. It was formed in the United States in 1974 at Naropa University. The main objectives of that educational philosophy

is to integrate introspection and experiential learning into academic study in order to support academic and social engagement, develop self-understanding as well as analytical and critical capacities, and cultivate skills for engaging constructively with others.

Informed by the many forms of contemplative practice in philosophies and religions the world over, contemplative education invites students to embrace the immediacy of their interior lives as a means for applying their own first-person experiences to what they are learning in their classrooms (more information on this issue, including a list of bibliography: “Contemplative education”, 2016).

The American philosophy of education has gained popularity particularly recently as the contemplative practices (such as mindfulness and yoga) have sparked the interest of educators at all levels. It has inspired networks of higher-education professionals for the advancement of contemplative education, primarily the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE, 2008).

This philosophy attempts to combine the world of human spiritual experience with the experience of everyday life through self-reflection, analysis, experience of the other, etc. This requires specific measures and this philosophy suggests: sitting meditation, t'ai-chi ch'uan, aikido, yoga, Chinese brushstroke and ikebana. These are some of the most commonly referred-to contemplative practices, but there are many others, including other traditional arts, ritual practices and activist practices (“Contemplative education”, 2016).

For a better understanding of that philosophy, let us briefly brood upon the etymology of these two key concepts: education and contemplation.

Etymologically, the word “education” is derived from the Latin *ēducātiō* and means (“a breeding, a bringing up, a rearing”) from *ēducō* (“I educate, I train”) which is related to the homonym *ēducō* (“I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect”) from *ē-* (“from, out of”) and *dūcō* (“I lead, I conduct”). It is important to note that “education” is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits (“Etymonline”, 2016).

Contemplation: “religious musing,” from Old French *contemplation* or directly from Latin *contemplatio* “act of looking at,” from *contemplat-*, past participle stem of *contemplari* “to gaze attentively, observe,” originally “to mark out a space for observation” (as an augur does). From *com-*, intensive prefix, and *templum* “area for the taking of auguries” (<http://www.etymonline.com>; access: 29.06.2016). Normal sense should be: the act of contemplating, thoughtful observation, full or deep consideration, reflection. In a religious sense, contemplation is usually a type of prayer or meditation.

Generally speaking, the philosophy of contemplative education would include the realm of education / formation of man through and in the world we live in, but above all in the religious world. This is also the sense of the American contemplative education, which was created based on Buddhist spirituality.

3. Jesuit Philosophy of Contemplative Education

Before we proceed to the basic presentation of the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education, there should be made two preliminary observations:

- a) in order to talk about the object of education, namely a man, one needs to specify the nature of anthropology understood by us, which will allow a better understanding of the subsequent argumentation. Man, in order to find out who he is,

first has to meet himself. This is possible only in the situation when he meets the other. It has to be a meeting in dialogue, when “I” and “you” come together. The necessary space for the meeting is created and filled by the Transcendence – God. This is the necessary condition for discovering man’s personality and man’s existence; this is the basis for finding who the man is. Christian anthropology claims that it is the transcendent-horizontal anthropology because it combines four essential relations of the man: to God, to the other man, to the world and to himself. The quality of these relations defines our humanity. Despite the historic trends of dualism, despite overemphasizing only some of the dimensions, we do understand the man as the spiritual and physical being, which constitutes personal unity (Pasierbek, 2013, p. 27).

This is the so-called dialogical personalism.

- b) in the 60s of the last century one of the greatest theologians, the Jesuit, Karl Rahner, presented a new proposal of the so-called transcendental theological anthropology. It concerns a man being open to the transcendence and – as a consequence – to God. He believed that man has possibilities and seeks to open up to the reality outside himself. The method of reasoning starts from the reality that undoubtedly exists – namely from the humanity of a man. Man tends by its nature to that which surpasses it, which opens up new horizons, new opportunities. It is enough just to look at mountaineers or Himalayan mountaineers who climb still higher, and in increasingly dangerous places, and even that life-threatening risk is enormous, they do not give up getting to the places where human

foot has never been placed. A man has always been looking for the truth, he wants to experience good and revel in the beauty. There is an accompanying inherent sense of freedom and independence, as a condition of personal subjectivity. In all this, God appears as a condition of the possibility of complete freedom, moral obligation, interpersonal love and hope in the sense of reality, in the sense of life, despite the risks arising from death. The one whom we call God makes himself known as freedom, love, giving himself in an unlimited act, as the sense of itself, as a living foundation of reality which guarantees life (Schneider, 1995).

After determining our anthropological assumptions, we can proceed to the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education, which assumes such understanding of a man, namely the one who believes in God and the one who is looking for Him in different ways, because that is the nature of man.

3.1. The source of Jesuit philosophy of education – Ignatian spirituality and *contemplativus in actione*

Jerome Nadal, the closest collaborator of St. Ignatius of Loyola, left the testimony of the founder of the Society of Jesus: “I shall not fail to recall that grace which he had in all circumstances, while at work or in conversation, of feeling the presence of God and of tasting spiritual things, of being contemplative even in the midst of action; he used to interpret this as seeking God in all things” (Nadal, 1898, p. 651).

Being contemplative in action (*contemplativus in actione*) has become perhaps the most recognizable feature of Ignatian spirituality. It is in fact a synthesis of Ignatius’ entire spiritual experience, meeting with God, and providing Him with a response. This spirituality is a sign of mature faith, covering all areas of life, expressed not only in prayers and in the so-called inner life, but also deciding of man’s commitment, his style of thinking and acting, professing certain values and ideals.

3.1.1. Union with God in all things

In the Jesuit Constitutions, in the section on the Superior General of the Society, Ignatius presents his ideal profile. It is widely believed that he unwittingly outlined in this place his self-portrait. Here is what he wrote:

Among the many qualities that one would rightly expect in the General, the first and foremost is that he be intimately united to God and thoroughly at home with the Lord, whether in prayer or when otherwise occupied; so that he may the more abundantly draw from the source of every good gift a large share of graces and blessings for the whole body of the Society of Jesus, and a powerful impulse for whatever is done in the service of humanity (“Constitutions”, 2008, 723).

In these words we can find the precise explanation of the Ignatian concept of being contemplative in action. The point is not to first pray and then act. It is about the constant union with God, both in prayer and in action. Naturally, in order to be contemplative in action, we need to become contemplative in prayer, during the personal encounter with God, when talking with Him, listening to His words, in considering the action of the Creator and Lord in our lives. But one can and should be also contemplative and united in God in action. It is therefore about fully integrating the whole human experience around God. It is only then that we will avoid superficial activism, not deeply rooted in God, which – in the long run – may prove to be sterile, distracting, and not helping in “putting us out into the deep.”

3.1.2. True devotion

A correct understanding of contemplativeness in action helps to make sense of devotion in Ignatian terms. These are the words of the Pilgrim – since this is how the Knight of Loyola perceived and described himself – that we find at the end of his *Autobiography*: “he always grew in godliness, namely in the ease of finding God, and now even more than ever in his life. Every time and at any time, whenever he wants to find God, he finds Him” (n. 99). This definition of piety can be very inspiring. It defines the attitude of a man who lives in God, finds Him not only in prayer or in the church, but in each experience and all events, in the encountered people, in the joys and in sufferings, in the victories and in defeats. He finds Him in life and in death.

In the said *Constitutions* of the Society St. Ignatius advises young Jesuits

All should make diligent efforts to keep their intention right, not only in regard to their state of life but also in all particular details. In these they should always aim at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness, for its own sake and because of the incomparable love and benefits with which God has anticipated us, rather than for fear of punishments

or hope of rewards, although they ought to draw help also from them. Further, they should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things, stripping off from themselves the love of creatures to the extent that this is possible, in order to turn their love upon the Creator of them, by loving Him in all creatures and all of them in Him, in conformity with His holy and divine will (288).

Searching for and finding God in all is seen as a criterion, measure, and the fruit of true piety.

3.1.3. Piety of today's Jesuits

As the Society of Jesus today, we are a *community of memory*. Community of memory does not create and invent itself, but grows out of the primordial and original event, which it attempts to extend in time. For this purpose, the community of memory tells its past and provides the example of people who have most experienced and expressed the sense and the intentions of the community ("Przyjąć dar i podjąć misję", 2006, p. 8).

The above words explain why nowadays the Jesuits go back to the heritage of holiness and thought of St. Ignatius and his first companions and to their experience. From this experience there originated the Society of Jesus and the spirituality of the Order. By returning to their roots, to the sources, they find in them the original features of their spiritual identity and that which they refer to as "their way of acting."

The ideal of contemplativeness in action is present in the entire Jesuit spirituality. It resonates in Jesuit documents, in the letters of the subsequent Superiors General, as well as in the decrees of the subsequent General Congregations. This ideal is indeed the core of the Jesuit piety and action.

3.1.4. In today's world

The 34th General Congregation, meeting in Rome in 1995, has developed a synthetic decree entitled "Characteristics of our way of proceeding." What is characteristic in the attitude, the spirituality and the style of action of the present Jesuits? The Congregation enumerated eight such characteristics. In the first place there is indicated "deep personal love for Jesus Christ" and immediately, in the second place, "being contemplative in action."

We read in this document,

The God Ignatius is the God who is at work in all things: labouring for the salvation of all. (...) the God labouring for the liberation of the world; beginning, preserving, directing and advancing the Society of Jesus as at the beginning and end of the Constitutions. For a Jesuit, therefore, not just any response to the needs of the men and women of today will do. The initiative must come from the Lord labouring in events and people here and now. God invites us to join the Lord, labouring to bring everything to its fullness, is central to the Jesuit way of proceeding. It is the Ignatian method of prayerful discernment, which can be described as “a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being *contemplative in action* (d. 26, nn. 7-8).

These words help us to understand how Ignatian and Jesuit piety leads to the apostolate and how it determines its character. This devotion leads to people, in order to accompany them in their daily experiences and struggles, to help them to live everything with God and for God.

The documents of the most recent, 35th General Congregation (2008) are also infused with the ideal of being contemplative in action. This ideal is the main thought through the whole set of the statements of the Society about how it sees its place and its mission in the contemporary world.

Here is just one excerpt from the decree “A Fire that Kindles Other Fires Rediscovering our Charism:”

In a world that overwhelms people with a multiplicity of sensations, ideas, and images, the Society seeks to keep the fire of its original inspiration alive in a way that offers warmth and light to our contemporaries. (...) Jesuits must manifest – especially in the contemporary world of ceaseless noise and stimulation – a strong sense of the sacred inseparably joined to involvement in the world. Our deep love of God and our passion for his world should set us on fire – a fire that starts other fires! (d. 2, nn. 1, 10).

3.1.5. Fire of the new evangelization

The contemporary Church is alive by the idea of a new evangelization. Two recent popes lived by this idea, namely John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and it is in a very special way carried out by Pope Francis.

The main problem of the modern world is a weakening faith in God. There is fought a decisive battle so that God could be present in the

centre of human life and community. A huge challenge for the Church has become secularism, that is, the concept of human life that assumes that God does not exist. Secularism does not fight with God. It simply ignores His existence and presence. Man leaning to this ideology is trying to build his own world, his future, his happiness – without the Creator. Such a project must end in a failure. Yet, can one remain passive? Is it possible to live quietly, seeing that there come to the fore the ideologies and programs that radically undermine all that St. Ignatius Loyola wrote about God and man in the Foundation of his Spiritual Exercises?

There is no doubt that Ignatian spirituality is good for hard times and it prepares us to take up the challenges we face. It also prepares us to give the right answer to this challenge. The spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and his spiritual sons organizes reality and reveals the correct image of God, man and the world. It introduces us in the experience of God, in a deep and inner knowledge of Jesus Christ, in order to recognize His presence in our lives and in all matters of the world around us. This should be done while being contemplative in prayer and in action, discerning the signs of the time, helping others to discover the deeper meaning of their personal experiences.

Being contemplative in action is the foundation, the style, the inner attitude that allows to choose the right strategy and tools to fight today under the banner of the cross for the Kingdom of God, for faith and justice contained in it. To “love and serve in everything” (“Spiritual Exercises”, 233).

3.2. Jesuit philosophy of education

On the basis of previously presented Ignatian spirituality it will be easier for us to proceed to a Jesuit education and its philosophy. The history of Jesuit education, as well as schools and universities dates back to the end of the sixteenth century. It was then when the world's first systematic educational document *Ratio Studiorum* (1599) was created. The said document included a specific philosophy, materials, teaching methods for hundreds of Jesuit schools in Europe, Latin America and Asia. The goal that was then set by the Jesuits concerned the education of the youth on the basis of Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy, namely being contemplative in action.

In the era of mass media, a powerful technologizing of life, loss of ideals in young people, the dangers resulting from social inequality

with a global reach, it proves difficult to apply the principles of the late sixteenth century. It is obvious that the said document, containing specific ways and educational methods cannot completely correspond to modern times, so very different from the past.

Therefore, after several years of work, in 1986, there was created the document entitled *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, which is like an “aggiornamento” of the content and the message of *Ratio Studiorum*. The essential question that runs through the document is: what kind of a man we would like to raise and according to what principles and which philosophy of education?

The former Jesuit General, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach said that

The pursuit of each student’s intellectual development to the full measure of God-given talents rightly remains a prominent goal of Jesuit education. Its aim, however, has never been simply to amass a store of information or preparation for a profession, though these are important in themselves and useful to emerging Christian leaders. The ultimate aim of Jesuit education is, rather, that full growth of the person which leads to action – action, especially, that is suffused with the spirit and presence of Jesus Christ, the son of God, the Man-for-Others. This goal of action, based on sound understanding and enlivened by contemplation, urges students to self-discipline and initiative, to integrity and accuracy. At the same time, it judges slipshod or superficial ways of thinking unworthy of the individual and, more important, dangerous to the world he or she is called to serve (“Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach”, 1993, p. 6).

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach clearly emphasizes that “sound understanding and enlivened contemplation” constitute the sense and the source of the philosophy of Jesuit education. Understanding presupposes prior contemplation, namely taking a closer look and exploring in the spiritual and rational reflection the undergoing processes and experience of the individual. The outcome of the contemplation should form the part of the action through rational operation. It is therefore about the authentic formation of man who could read and understand today’s reality, seeking in it those values that will serve the common good.

This type of the educational philosophy forms a man as “men and women for others” (Arrupe, 1974). This, in turn, assumes that such a man is an intelligent person, a person who is intellectually competent, ideologically and religiously open, capable of properly evaluating phenomena, drawing conclusions, responsible and sensitive to social justice.

3.2.1. Assumptions of Jesuit education philosophy

The assumptions that will be presented, will allow us to better understand the meaning of contemplative activity which is the subject of the Jesuit system of education.

If the aim is to form a man “for others,” there must be first submitted the motivational assumptions. The other man has to be treated by me as a “gift for me,” that is, someone who is indispensable and necessary in shaping my humanity. This will involve the need for the openness to the world and to the other in the spirit of improving the quality of one’s humanity, culture and professionalism – in terms of Jesuit continuous “magis – better, more.”

The second assumption is the content. It is about presenting Jesus Christ as the “Perfect Man,” in order to perceive in His humanity the ideal of realizing one’s own humanity, which should be open to all kinds of contemporary pluralisms: religious, cultural, social, philosophical, which stands for the openness to otherness and newness (Pasierbek, 2007).

The third assumption is the educational process, which will outline how the person raised is formed to contemplation in action. The same should be applied by an adult who does no longer need a direct educational activity.

Context: teachers consider the context of student’ lives: family, society, politics, economics, culture, religion and other realities which affect the life and learning process.

Experience: Teachers foster a broad base of experience which requires application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation so that learners are attentive to the human reality that confronts them.

Reflection: Teachers formulate questions and guide discussion, journalkeeping, reaction/reflection papers and other activities helping students reconsider subject matter so that they discover meaning in their experiences and learning.

Action: Through experience that has been reflected upon, students make the truth their own and serve others. They become impelled to act upon their convictions for the welfare of society.

Evaluation: Teachers evaluate the whole person using effective methods such as assessment, peer tutoring, mentoring, journal, reflections and critical skill application. Teachers congratulate and encourage students for their progress (Duminuco, 2002, p. 204; the author used the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, “Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach”, 1993).

3.2.2. Jesuit vision of a man contemplative in action

The presented educational process is aimed at shaping / forming the integrated human being, a man who is free, a man of great desires and ideals, a man who will be sensitive to others, to social justice and who will exist "for others."

The main point of that paradigm is the ability to combine the facts of the past in the present with the prospect for the future. Man is in fact a temporary being, locked between the three dimensions, and the whole art of life is to be able to find oneself in it. Therefore, the proposed Jesuit *ars educandi et contemplandi* focuses on the said ability of studying in order to discover the relations between one's own experiences and the experiences of others and the values that the latter entails. This all implies a search for the truth about oneself, about the other man and about the world in becoming more and more free.

This process involves our volitionality, emotionality, comprehension, memory, imagination, in a word – an integrated man in his autonomous being.

A special place is taken here by a process of reflection / contemplation in the present time, because it is where the past and the future meet. Reflection allows for a repeated, rational consideration of experiences, ideas and behaviours of the past, to seek truth, authenticity and fuller meaning in them.

Thus reflection is the process by which meaning surfaces in human experience:

- a) by understanding the truth being studied more clearly;
- b) by understanding the sources of the sensations or reactions I experience in this consideration;
- c) by deepening my understanding of the implications of what I have grasped for myself and for others;
- d) by achieving personal insights into events, ideas, truth, or the distortion of truth;
- e) by coming to some understanding of... what moves me, and why... and who I might be in relation to others (Duminuco, 2002).

In this way, the reflection causes that personal experience becomes "mine," there takes place the so-called appropriation. In such world of experience and values a man designs the future, being henceforth wiser due to the entire past. Since then his direct action will be based on truth, which is found in reflection.

It is at the same time important that this process should take place in these four anthropological dimensions of the said dialogical

personalism. The reference to God, to another man and to the world around us allows for a greater objectivity of one's own assessment and, on the other hand, shows those elements that are obscured by selfishness and self-centeredness.

3.3. Recommendations and conclusions

Inspired by the American philosophy of contemplative education, which has been briefly presented at the beginning, and which operates in similar areas, we wished to present the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education which flows from the spirituality of that order. It should be emphasized that both the American system of that education, and a Jesuit one deem as a condition sine qua non the religious world – a reference to a transcendental anthropology, a reference to God. It consists in the fact that through inner reflection and peace of mind there takes place the analysis of the experience, in order to search for the utterly right answers and the truth outside oneself, namely in the transcendence, in God, and then to “come home” to work outside with the entire arsenal of the wealth of truth and values thus gained.

And it is not just about the vision of a superman, but a particular man, who will be looking for the right humanism, by ensuring the reliability of knowledge, its objectivity, truth and uniqueness. It seems that the modern world does not need as much a “technical” man but rather a humanist sensitive “to others.” He needs not be immediately the Nobel laureate, but a man focused on his action and his improvement. This has to be accompanied by an attitude of creative wonder of the world: reflection, evaluation, measures and action in order to achieve the goal. Contemplativeness in action is an internal and coherent integration between what I think, judge, believe and a concrete action and relationships with others.

From the presented analysis there emerges a vision of a “man for others,” full of knowledge, emotional stability, competent, someone that can be relied on and whom one can always count on.

It would be a good thing if the educational systems took into account in educational programs and processes the need to integrally educate a man as a being of spiritual and bodily unity based on a contemplative reflection and action. The vision of a man, proposed by the Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education in action seems to us by all means intriguing and feasible to implement.

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