

## Summary

### Youth in the service of the altar

Selected socio-pedagogical aspects of the community  
of altar servers in the Catholic Church

One of the key issues among the many considered in this study is the problem of young people in altar service, i.e. young people focused on belonging to the community of altar servers, that is, a group of people who 'serve' in the church, identified in a particular way with Christian education embedded in the current of personalism, a social group which yields many priests and members of religious orders.

Referring to the place of young people in the Roman Catholic Church, it should be emphasised that for many years young people have occupied an important place in both society and the Church, and since the 1960s the situation of young people in the Church has gradually strengthened, also undergoing various positive transformations. Pope John Paul II made a significant contribution to these changes, as did figures such as Fr. Prof. Franciszek Blachnicki, the creator of altar boys' pedagogy, Fr. Prof. Marian Nowak, an outstanding theologian and pedagogue who marked out the contemporary directions of Christian education, and the pastor and scholar Fr. Janusz Tarnowski, who implemented important postulates for the formation of contemporary views on upbringing in the Christian faith, and who also inclined in his pedagogy towards a sensitive "dialogue" with other human beings. Other theologians and pastoral educators whose scholarly work forms the source basis of this study have also contributed to the development of integral education in accordance with the principles of Christ's teachings as derived from the points established by Vatican II.

The Ministry of Altar Servers, i.e. the formation functioning within the framework of youth liturgical altar service in the Roman Catholic Church seems to be a subject worthy of attention because of its long tradition, its universality and its servile, communal character, especially considered in its socio-pedagogical context. The pastoral care of altar boys is a permanent feature of every parish. The pastor is a teacher, a guide; his duty is to care for deepening the young people's value system, to guide them in the ways of self-education, to show them support in difficult situations, and to deepen their spiritual life and Catholic faith. A priest in charge of adolescent altar boys becomes a special authority figure for them, he performs a number of educational duties and, like a teacher, is obliged to forge relations not only with altar boys but also with their parents, school form teachers and catechists.

The altar boys and girls constitute a community of young adolescents seeking their own path in life and forming their identity in a social group with similar beliefs and ideals. Participation in a community with similar values is extremely important for the development of young people, since the psychological changes that take place during adolescence mainly consist in acquiring the ability to shape one's own life independently, and include the search for new values and ideas.

The importance of the subject taken up by K. Sadowska and M. Kedzia lies in the relationship between religion and identity having been the subject of sociologists' research since the beginning of the 20th century. Among these sociologists, Emil Durkheim should be mentioned first and foremost, who argued that religion is something "eminently" social, and religious representations are collective representations that express social reality. Religion is therefore a source of solidarity for society; it gives meaning to people's lives, it is a key part of the social system and, in addition, it provides control and social cohesion. Religion is also a way of affirming the norms accepted in a given society.

The Liturgical Ministry of the Altar in its contemporary form is the result of decisions made by the Church authorities during the Second Vatican Council, which took place in the 1960s. All the principles for the formation of altar servers are based on the principles of pastoral theology, hence they are also directly connected to pastoral pedagogy, one of whose founders is Father Franciszek Blachnicki, a supporter and advocate of all conciliar reforms, and the creator of the Pedagogy of the New Man. Following the arrangements of the Second Vatican Council and in the concept of F. Blachnicki, altar service is perceived as an elite formation with Christian personalism and the principle of community at its root.

In constructing the framework of the study, the principle of sources has been adopted. The sources for the study include existing sources such as non-series publications, articles from series publications and encyclopaedic entries of prominent pedagogues and members of the Church hierarchy. In addition, other sources form the basis for analysis, such as electronic websites devoted to the problems of altar boys, articles from Catholic and socio-pedagogical magazines available in the repositories of Polish universities, non-series publications concerning the problems of the Roman Catholic Church, and Church documents available in pdf form. The study also made use of excerpts from doctoral and master's theses prepared at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

Among the sources elicited for the purposes of this study, we can specify interviews on young people in altar service which the authors conducted with experts. These interviews were carried out with the principle of communicative fluency, in a way that allowed the researchers to obtain relevant information.

However, this study addresses only selected socio-pedagogical problems regarding the education of young people in forming the Christian community. The publication seeks to show a fragment of the social reality of young altar servers from the perspective of personalistic pedagogy, seeking to present 'service' as the voluntary 'giving' of one's own personal resources to others in order for a person to achieve true freedom.

The authors hope that reading the monograph will contribute to the discussion on values that are important for young people's education, which, according to K. Sadowska and M. Kedzia, seem to be gradually recognised as less important than material goods in the modern world.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*