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RELIGION AND CRITIQUE – JACQUES ELLUL’S CONCEPT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENERAL PEDAGOGY¹

*Revelation is [...] an inquisitor's
manual. It is the granite throne
from which we are allowed to
pass judgments without the risk
of being in error, and without
which our pitiful skeleton will
not bear us. By supporting
ourselves through revelation,
we can do more than move the
Earth: we can stop its motion*

Leszek Kołakowski²

BETWEEN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – AN INTRODUCTION

“Have you been nice?” Santa Claus asks a boy. “Yes,” the little boy answers, lowering his eyes. “Have you been obedient?”, Santa continues to enquire. “Always” reassures the boy. “You won’t get anything until you’ve wised up,” shouts the angry Santa Claus.

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² L. Kołakowski, *Nasza wesola apokalipsa. Wybór najważniejszych esejów*, Kraków 2010, p. 62.

This satirical drawing by Jan Koza humorously captures the colloquial intuitions of pedagogical *praxis* in the field of its tensions between obedience and disobedience, necessity and freedom, submissiveness and resistance, and finally – compulsion and emancipation, becoming, unexpectedly, an inspiration to reflect on the tasks of general pedagogy as a kind of metatheory. This kind of dialectics, expressed by means of discipline-relevant categories, determines one of the possible ways of “rationalizing” and systematizing various pedagogical theories, revealing the underlying yet covert convictions of ontological, epistemological and ethical nature³. It makes it possible to reconstruct maps of “pedagogical thinking”, sub-disciplines, currents and directions, as well as concepts and theories.

Basically, they can be placed on a continuum between two poles. On the one hand there is positivism that grows out of epistemological realism⁴. Here, the cognitive subject is perceived as radically external to the object of cognition, autonomous and sovereign, not “polluting” the results of cognition with any individual, species or historical quality, thus guaranteeing the acquisition of “bare facts”, i.e. “true knowledge”⁵. On the other hand there is the intellectual heritage of postmodernism and critical theory⁶, where the cognitive subject is an entangled subject, unclear, constituting a space for the clash of various forces originating in the discourses of knowledge, power, language and ideology, and the knowledge produced in such a cognitive process is a particular, biased, local knowledge that grows, as Gianni Vattimo puts it, from “the experience of oscillation” rather than from stability and permanence⁷. In other words: on the one hand, we deal with a permanent and asymmetrical relation between the subject and the object of pedagogical thinking, clearly delineated fields of their mutual roles and interactions, and a clearly polarized pool of concepts (e.g. scholar vs. studied reality, educator vs. student, education for obedience vs. education for freedom). On the other hand, there are temporary, unclear, involved, dynamic approaches to the process of cognition and the categories

³ See B. Śliwerski, “Badania porównawcze teorii wychowania”, [in:] *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol. 2, ed. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, Warszawa 2003, p. 52.

⁴ See S. Palka, *Pedagogika w stanie tworzenia*, Kraków 1999, p. 13.

⁵ See S. Amsterdamski, *Between History and Method. Disputes about the Rationality of Science*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 145, 1992, p. 97.

⁶ See L. Witkowski, “Radykalne wizje podmiotu w dramacie współczesności”, [in:] L. Witkowski, *Edukacja wobec sporów o ponowoczesność*, Warszawa 1998, p. 107.

⁷ See G. Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, Cambridge 1992, p. 11.

that make up the reconstructed pedagogical reality and the methodology of “reading” knowledge.

This framework and fields create contexts for developing notions, concepts and pedagogical theories, contexts of different philosophical references, rationality, epistemological and teleological justifications. Particular topographies will trigger different social ideas about pedagogical theory and practice; local research efforts to understand phenomena and their contexts will be different. The role of general pedagogy will be to compare, integrate, explain and locate pedagogical knowledge about such different etiologies, etymologies and various tasks on the map of pedagogical thinking in general.

For the deliberations, analyses and findings contained in the further part of the article, it will be important to locate the phenomenon under scrutiny in accordance with the topography of the discipline, which helps not only to identify its belonging to a given region, but also to highlight its essential features. I assume that in the case of Jacques Ellul’s ideas, the evident points of reference are simultaneously critical pedagogy and pedagogy of religion.

Ellul’s concept of Christian anarchy which will be presented in the following parts of the article, can be read as an interesting example of the use of perspective, logic and terminology specific to pedagogy built on the basis of critical theory. As its supporters and researchers Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren emphasize: “Whereas traditional researchers see their task [exclusively - M. H.] as the description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, critical researches often regard their work as a first step towards forms of political action that can address the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself. [...] Research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism – self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims. Thus, critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site”⁸. This is how in his essay *Anarchy and Christianity*, Ellul clearly

⁸ J.L. Kincheloe, P. McLaren, “Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research”, [in:] *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, London, New Delhi 2005, p. 305-306.

defines the position he adopts, defines the social, religious and political position of his voice. Although he lacks consistency in following the path of continuous self-masking of his own epistemological and ideological limitations, he does not meet the critical postulate of being, as Lech Witkowski puts it, a “guardian of absence”⁹, who constantly feeds the concern to identify potential deficits, traps or threats resulting from ignorance of one’s own limitations, this is perhaps due to the fact that his text was not intended as a scientific treatise. Ellul writes an essay, personal and committed, in which he criticizes the dominant interpretation of Christian revelation, describing it as an unjustified and oppressive usurpation of religious institutions of power, exposing its ideological interests, which in his opinion have little in common with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. *Anarchy and Christianity* is a sort of theological manifesto in which the biblical text is used and its authorial interpretation is then embedded in a broader socio-cultural-historical context, thus constructing a peculiar “theology of anarchy”. Ellul, in order to explain the Christian message and to justify his own actions on the grounds of Christology, soteriology and social science, draws on the achievements of liberation theology and religious anarchism¹⁰.

The author does not define himself as a religious pedagogue in any place, however, religious pedagogy having the status of a specific direction within general pedagogy¹¹ is interested in this type of reconstruction of the texts of sacred books and the experiences built up in relation to them. As Bogusław Milerski emphasizes in his study on this subject: “If religious education should be oriented towards the specific hermeneutics of human existence, then in the learning process one should refer to issues which take into account everything that both the individual and society experience as significant for shaping one’s own life and self-fulfilment. For religious education is not primarily about the transmission of doctrinal truths, but about the development

⁹ See L. Witkowski, *Wyzwania autorytetu w praktyce społecznej i kulturze symbolicznej (przechadzki krytyczne w poszukiwaniu dyskursu dla teorii)*, Kraków 2009, p. 22.

¹⁰ Discussing the rich tradition of theology of liberation and religious anarchism falls outside the scope of this article. General orientation in this area can be given, among others, by the following publications: B. Mondin, *I teologi della liberazione*, Roma 1977; *Teologowie Trzeciego Świata: jedenaście szkiców biograficznych z Afryki, Azji i Ameryki Łacińskiej*, ed. H. Waldenfels, Warszawa 1987; *Leksykon wielkich teologów XX i XXI wieku*, vol. 1-3, ed. J. Majewski, J. Makowski, Warszawa 2003-2006.

¹¹ Cf. B. Milerski, “Pedagogika religii”, [in:] *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol. 1, ed. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, Warszawa 2003, p. 261-277.

of a religious way of self-understanding, orientation and action”¹². Ellul’s manifesto seems to be a perfect example of a text which, growing out of the Christian religious tradition, at the same time significantly disrupts and deconstructs it. From a metatheoretical perspective, the author’s reconstruction and reinterpretation of classical and dogmatic interpretations of selected principles of the Christian faith (from the Catholic and Protestant perspectives) may constitute an interesting example of a creative dialogue with traditions, in which the source of the text remains in constant interpretative movement and cannot be permanently attributed to any of them. Thus, responsibility for the integration, formation and internalisation of the content of the faith remains the responsibility of the autonomous subject, not of institutionalised religious education. For the above reasons, I assume that Ellul’s theological and political proposal is a valuable inspiration for general pedagogy to reflect on the borderline zone of critical pedagogy and religious pedagogy.

JACQUES ELLUL AS A CHRISTIAN ANARCHIST

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994)¹³ is a French thinker whose writings are located at the intersection of philosophy, theology, sociology, and law. A lawyer by education, he earned his doctorate and post-doctoral degree in law in 1936 and 1943, respectively. Between 1944 and 1980 he lectured in law history, sociology and theology at the University of Bordeaux and the Institute of Political Studies there. He is known as a Protestant theologian and theoretician of Christian anarchism, an idea situated in the broad and internally diversified current of the Christian left, which combines Christian thought with a variety of social reform programs¹⁴. Parallel to his academic activity, Ellul was involved in the work of associations preventing crime among young people, as well as conducted

¹² Ibidem, p. 276.

¹³ Unless otherwise marked, the biographical information is provided after: Ł. P. Skurczyński, *Życie znaczący stawiać opór. Ellul dla początkujących*, <http://ewangelicki.pl/20162-3/zyc-znaczy-stawiac-opor-ellul-dla-poczatkujacych-lukasz-p-skurczynski/> (access: 23.12.2016).

¹⁴ This current included both reformist groups, referring to the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the ultra-leftist movements of Christian communists and anarchists. The story of one of them, the Catholic Worker movement, founded in the 1930s in New York by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, is the background to the biography of its co-founder, published by Jim Forest (cf. J. Forest, *Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day*, New York 1994).

pro-ecological activities (he is considered to be one of the representatives of political ecology)¹⁵. As a member of the national council of the Reformed Church of France and a committed Christian, he worked for the benefit of his fellow-believers, making sure that, as he himself described it, they become an “active movement that changes society from within”¹⁶. From his early youth, i.e. the 1930s, he remained intellectually under the strong influence of Karl Marx’s works, researching and analysing them for more than thirty years of his academic career. He was also the first French scientist to teach Marx’s thought at the Institute of Political Studies since 1947.

However, he did not have good relations with the French communists. As he writes in *Anarchy and Christianity*: “They [communists – M.H.] viewed me as a little bourgeois intellectual because I did not show total respect for orders from Moscow, and I regarded them as insignificant because they seemed not to have any true knowledge of the thinking of Marx. They had read the 1848 Manifesto, and that was all! I broke with them completely after the Moscow trials”¹⁷. Over the years, he grew more and more estranged to Marxism in its “dogmatic” form, while remaining attached to Marx’s negation of capitalism.

Initially, as a committed Christian and Marxist, he found a place for himself in the mainstream of moderate socialism. Over time, however, as he himself repeatedly pointed out, biblical studies and analyses directed him towards anarchism.

Unfortunately, he was ideologically unacceptable to left-wing anarchists. Despite lively social contacts, the anarchist organizations to which he applied for membership decided against cooperation with him¹⁸. Ellul’s faith stood in the way of his recognition by circles that are suspicious of religious people and who are committed to ideas. It should be remembered that, as Christopher Hitchens, a famous protester and continuator of the Marxist tradition of criticism of religion stresses: “Religion is, and always has been, a means of control”.

¹⁵ As Łukasz P. Skurczyński observes, a posthumous publication came out of “pioneer” texts dedicated to political ecology from the 1930s by Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau: *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous. Textes pionniers de l’écologie politique* (Paris 2014).

¹⁶ See J. Ellul, *A temps et a contretemps. Entretiens avec Mr Garrigou-Langrange*, Paris 1981, p. 78-79, after: Ł. P. Skurczyński, *Życie znaczy stawiać opór*, op. cit.

¹⁷ J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, Grand Rapids 1999, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 4-5.

There is something irreducibly servile and masochistic about the religious mentality. And the critical and oppositional stance does ultimately rest on a belief in the capacity and pride of the individual, while religion tends to dissolve this into a sickly form of collectivism¹⁹.

The above viewpoint was shared by most of the anarchists Ellul knew. As a result, he was made to develop his ideology on his own, outside of the structures of the associations and groups he was familiar with. It is hardly surprising that the French philosopher and these circles were involved in this kind of conflict. Religion is the space generating probably the most criticism in the history of contestation and emancipation movements. The distinction between religion and faith, which Ellul also points to, does not solve the problems, perhaps even adds to them. While it is relatively easy, even from the perspective of a local believer, to dissociate oneself from the oppressive activity of religious institutions and colonization attempts of their dignitaries, showing without much difficulty the hypocrisy, wickedness and heartlessness of the mechanisms and regulations of most of them, it may prove impossible in the case of Ellul to gain a real distance to one's own internal constitution as a believer.

The question remains, however, as to the legitimacy of making fundamental distinctions between constructs: A "believing anarchist" and a "non-believing anarchist". If the basic accusation made to the former by the latter would be an unacceptable submission to and submission to a certain vision of the place and role of man in the imaginary reality, it would be a double-edged accusation: is not a non-believing anarchist in his actions motivated by the available vision of a better world, with the whole specific metaphysics and eschatology of this image, as Leszek Kołakowski would say? In the face of such a problem, the main reason for the mutual "mismatch" presented by Ellul does not seem to be fully convincing:

A true anarchist thinks that an anarchist society without the State, without power, without organization, without hierarchy is possible; that it would be possible to live in it and that it could be created, but I do not think so. In other words, it seems to me that the anarchist struggle and battle aimed at an anarchist society are fundamental, but it is not possible to create such a society [...] [because - M. H.] people are not good. [...] I am saying that their two great characteristics, no matter what their society or education, are covetousness and the desire for power. We find these traits always and everywhere. If, then, we give people complete freedom to choose, they will

¹⁹ C. Hitchens, *Letters to a Young Contrarian*, New York 2005, p. 58.

inevitably seek to dominate someone or something, and they will inevitably covet what belongs to others, and a strange feature of covetousness is that it can never be assuaged or satisfied. [...] No society is possible among people who compete for power or who covet and find themselves coveting the same thing [...]. As I see it, then, an ideal anarchist society can never be achieved²⁰.

Ellul presents here and justifies his doubts about the project of secular anarchists, although at the same time he himself does not abandon the social vision of reality which he would like to see – after all, he writes about the “possibility” of inventing from scratch or creating a new social model, where the new institutions would be free from the flaws of the old ones²¹. Do not the alleged accusations²² levelled against him by lay anarchists concern the “imaginary”, ascribed to Ellul’s relations to religion? Perhaps, therefore, a dispute between them is an apparent one. This problem is well illustrated by the words of Rafał Włodarczyk, a researcher of educational ideologies and utopias:

The principles of defining, organizing and interpreting knowledge about action in a social reality subject to numerous, unevenly occurring changes cannot be separated from evaluation; the fundamental issue here is the choice of a path whose direction can only be recognized and considered in relation to the goal. In both political and educational practice, current or long-term action- and change-oriented actors must be guided by non-verifiable ideas about the future, establish scenarios for upcoming events, but also choose the means of their implementation, taking into account the potential transformations to which social reality will be subject in the meantime²³.

Without prejudging the causes and reasons, Ellul was forced to act outside established structures, developing his own “program” of integration of Christian thought and anarchism. He presented its underlying assumptions in *Anarchy and Christianity*, which is why in the following part of the article I will undertake a reconstruction of the views presented there by the author. My main concern is to show his way of thinking, argumentation and interpretation of the biblical text, rather than to discuss in detail the historical and ideological sources of

²⁰ J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 20.

²¹ See *ibidem*, p. 21.

²² Ellul does not mention in his text too extensive discussions with circles that did not decide to cooperate with him. It remains for us to conclude how both sides justified their arguments from the few scanty fragments of mutual claims, which the author briefly reports on (see *ibidem*, p. 3, 10, 15-18).

²³ R. Włodarczyk, *Ideologia, teoria, edukacja. Myśl Ericha Fromma jako inspiracja dla pedagogiki współczesnej*, Kraków 2016, p. 137-138.

religious anarchism as the context of the presented content. I think that from the point of view of the pedagogical potential of his concept, the potential resulting from the possibility of reading Ellul's thoughts from the perspective of critical pedagogy and religious pedagogy, its presentation, which will bear this affinity in mind, may turn out to be inspiring.

THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN ANARCHISM BY JACQUES ELLUL

In his introduction to *Anarchy and Christianity*, Ellul refers to the relations between Christianity and anarchism²⁴. Referring to personal experiences related to the lack of understanding for his ideological formation on the part of leftist anarchist organizations due to his openly confessing the Christian faith as well as due to the mistrust of Christian circles towards his open anarchism, the author assures that his goal is the need to articulate his views and not being a practicing “missionary” or a “proselyte” towards any of the parties²⁵. In a personal tone, using expressive and emotional language, he emphasizes his readiness to accept possible criticism. Nevertheless, the following statement is a good example of the rhetoric characteristic of the author: “Thus anarchist readers might find in these pages many statements that seem shocking or ridiculous, but that does not worry me”²⁶ (highlight – M.H.). After this initial explanation of Ellul's expression of his views, we can now move on to the fundamental issues related to his concept of Christian anarchism.

Ellul organizes his argument around two fundamental themes. The first is the problem of anarchy from the perspective of Christian practice, the second is the presentation of selected biblical texts as sources for theses about anarchy pointed out by him²⁷.

²⁴ In his text, the author does not systematically explain the conceptual apparatus which he intends to use. In his work, he interchangeably uses terms such as “anarchism” and “anarchy”. Wherever possible, my use of the terms will take into account the author's uses, i.e. when discussing the different parties of the essay or the author's arguments, I will use the exact term he uses in a given place.

²⁵ See J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 6.

²⁷ From a theological perspective, Ellul's interpretations could certainly bring to mind convergent or very similar concepts and themes in the history of various Christian traditions. However, as previously suggested, the aim of the article is not to establish the exact location of the author's theological views, but the way in which the author addresses the source text and orientates around it his own

The Judeo-Christian God Ellul speaks of is Almighty God, but, as the author of the essay notes, only to a very limited extent “makes use of his omnipotence in his dealings with us [...] (except in the biblical stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, or Sodom and Gomorrah)”²⁸. The image of God as King and Lord of Lords, as the French thinker proves, was constructed under the influence of Roman and Greek traditions, where the divinity of the ruler and the attributes of perfection and omnipotence associated with it were to serve political rather than religious purposes. Ellul emphasizes that the monarchical feature deeply rooted in Christian culture is the result of an unjustified shift in emphasis in the reading of the biblical revelation. The image of God as a ruler unjustly precedes the image of God as love, while “beyond power, the dominant and conditioning fact is that the being of God is love [...] When God creates, it is not to amuse himself, but because, being love, he wants someone to love other than himself! [...] The true face of the biblical God is love”²⁹. But love is rather a principle of God’s action than an attribute of God. He himself, according to the apophatic theology to which the philosopher refers³⁰, remains unrecognizable, escaping all cognitive and linguistic efforts of human description.

The decisive contention of the Bible is always that we cannot know God, that we cannot make an image of him, that we cannot analyse what he is [...] Hence the qualities that we attribute to God come from human reason and imagination. Perhaps it is the great merit of the Death-of-God theologies not to have killed off God but to have destroyed the images that we have made of God³¹.

The author criticizes this shift in emphasis to the aspect of divine power.

In reinterpreting biblical sources³², he argues that in its main message the Judaeo-Christian revelation, contrary to the dominant tradition of interpretation, leans not towards monarchy, but anarchy understood as a postulate of a fundamental lack of domination in the desired model of social relations. He makes the following remark to confirm his theses:

self-understanding and subjective action, categories important both for religious and general pedagogy.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 33.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ See ibidem, p. 36.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ellul refers to and discusses in this context e.g. excerpts from The First Book of Samuel, chapter 8, The Book of Judges, chapter 9, and from The Ecclesiastes.

We can say that in the biblical accounts ‘good’ kings are always defeated by Israel’s enemies, and the ‘great’ kings who win victories and extend their borders are always ‘bad.’ ‘Good’ means that they are just, that they do not abuse their power, and that they worship the true God of Israel. ‘Bad’ means that they promote idolatry, reject God, and are also unjust and wicked³³.

As he stresses,

for every king there was a prophet. The prophet [...] was most often a severe critic of royal acts. He claimed to come from God and to carry a word from God. This Word was always in opposition to royal power. [...] None of them came to the aid of a king; none was a royal counsellor; none was ‘integrated’³⁴.

And though the kings sometimes listened to the prophets who were sympathetic to them, claiming to be messengers of God, “none of the false prophecies that were favourable to the kings has been preserved in the holy scriptures”³⁵. This radical claim of an “anti-royalist stand”³⁶ of the biblical message becomes, as is natural, the reason why Ellul calls himself a Christian anarchist. At this point, however, it seems more important that the reinterpreted biblical events should give the reader an idea of the nature and intentions of God’s action in the world. God, who can be recognized throughout history, shows man a desirable order. It is an order based on freedom and love, not on hierarchical relationships of power and blind obedience. This order is a reflection of God’s nature, its specific emanation, and in the practice of the believer it is about practicing “truth”, by no means imposing it.

By rejecting the idea of God as master, Ellul rejects likewise the concept of Providence:

The idea of a power which foresees and ordains and controls all things is a curious one that has nothing Christian about it. There is no providence in the Bible, no God who distributes blessings, sicknesses, wealth, or happiness³⁷.

Such an idea, strengthening the dominance of the God-King, would be incompatible with human freedom: “If God foresees all things, if he is ‘providence,’ this rules out all human freedom”³⁸. A believer may interpret

³³ Ibidem, p. 50.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 51.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 51-52.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 52.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 36.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 35.

events in his or her life as gifts, warnings or punishments, but there can be no predestination force that determines his or her fate. Human life depends chiefly on the human person. God, on the seventh day of the work of creation, went to rest, passing on the further creation of history to him. God did not give up accompanying man, but only gave justice to his freedom, making him a causative subject and responsible for the actions of the world. He is still in dialogue with him, sometimes he intervenes – but only when human wickedness in relation to others becomes so intolerable that he has to intervene³⁹. The “intermingling of human history with God’s history”⁴⁰ is according to Ellul one of the tenets of the faith which is the hardest to fully comprehend:

We are confronted here by a divine-human dialectic. We ourselves are free to act and are responsible for our acts. But God also acts in each situation. The two actions then combine or oppose one another. In any case, we are never passive. God does not do everything⁴¹.

In Ellul’s theology there is no place for the ontologically grasped evil. Figures of the “evil god”, Satan or the Devil, are mythical representations of evil present and experienced in the world for which man is responsible. Man, the crown of divine creation, free and empowered, can make his own choices. Called to the love of God, he can oppose his will, doing harm and wreaking havoc. Every intervention of God would be an expression of man’s subjection, would cancel his inherent responsibility and would make him a puppet in the hands of the Creator. There is no form of evil, but there are forces acting, says Ellul:

All that which causes division between people (the very opposite of love) is the devil. Satan is the accuser, that is, that which causes people to bring accusations against one another. Evil derives from us in the twofold sense that we wrong ourselves and others and harm our neighbours, nature, etc.⁴².

When trying to show the working of the devil and to once again illustrate the evil of the state and authority, Ellul refers to the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert (Lk 4: 1-13). In this story, the devil is the one who promised to deliver to Jesus all power and authority

³⁹ See *ibidem*, p. 38. Ellul stops with a rather superficial explanation of „God’s interventions” in the situation of human wickedness. In its general discussion of theodicy, he does not deal with important questions posed in contemporary theology and philosophy (e.g. about the death of infants and children, about God’s silence during the Shoah, about the meaning of suffering and illnesses).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

over dominions in return for his homage to him. Jesus, as the French thinker stresses, does not question the fact that the devil wields power, but refuses to bow to him. As Ellul observes in a commentary to the biblical story:

what is at stake here is 'all the dominions of the world' [...]. And what these texts say is simply extraordinary: all power and glory of these kingdoms, and therefore all that concerns politics and political power, belongs to the 'devil'. All this has been given to him, and he gives it to whom he wants. Thus, those who hold political power have received it from the devil and are dependent on him! [...] The *diabolos* is etymologically the 'divider' (not a person). The state and politics are thus primary reasons for division. This is the point of the reference to the devil⁴³.

It is worth making a digression at this point. Its aim will be to show a certain tradition of thought, in which the theological motifs presented by Ellul can be located. This tradition is founded, among other things, on such categories of critical pedagogy as empowerment and emancipation. Although these themes do not constitute a coherent interpretation of Christological, soteriological or eschatological assumptions in Ellul's work, they help to reconstruct a certain permanent philosophical orientation of the author through consistent references to freedom, involvement, agency, or responsibility of the individual. The way in which he presents in the text the nature of God and man and their interdependence corresponds to the tradition of process theology⁴⁴. God is understood here as the primary cause and condition of events taking place in the world. However, the essence is the dialogue between God and man, in which the motifs of personalism⁴⁵ as well as pedagogical hermeneutics manifest themselves⁴⁶. As Mirosław Patalon, a Polish expert in process theology, writes:

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 52.

⁴⁴ See e.g. A.N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, New York 1926; M. Patalon, *Teologia a pedagogika. Teologia mediacji H. Niebuhra jako źródło inspiracji pedagogicznych*, Słupsk 2002; M. Patalon, *Pedagogika ekumenizmu. Procesualność jako paradygmat interkonfesyjnej i interreligijnej hermeneutyki w ujęciu Johna B. Cobb'a Jr.*, Gdańsk 2007; W. Hryniewicz, *Hermeneutyka w dialogu. Szkice teologiczno-ekumeniczne*, vol. 2, Opole 1998.

⁴⁵ See e.g. S. Chrost, *Homo capax Dei jako ideał wychowania*, Kraków 2013; C.S. Bartnik, *Personalizm*, Lublin 2008; W. Granat, *Personalizm chrześcijański. Teologia osoby ludzkiej*, Poznań 1985.

⁴⁶ See e.g. B. Milerski, M. Karwowski, *Racjonalność procesu kształcenia. Teoria i badanie*, vol. 2, Kraków 2016; B. Milerski, *Hermeneutyka pedagogiczna. Perspektywy pedagogiki religii*, Warszawa 2011; K. Mech, *Człowiek – Natura – Transcendencja*, Kraków 2014.

The historical process co-created by God has the character of a sequence of events – one update results from the previous one and at the same time initiates the next one, while preserving their local and momentary identity. [...] Christianity is understood as dynamic and developing [...] this process [has a character – M.H.] of reconstruction and is the effect of a creative divine-human relationship. It consists in the constant building up of the organism. Thus, on the one hand, we deal with the same religion, but on the other, it is continuously fresh and new. Questions about the purpose of this development are less important because the most important thing is not the destination of the pilgrimage, but its companion; it is certain that wherever a believer goes, he will be there with God⁴⁷.

Love as a principle of God's action both in Ellul's view and in theology of process is a source of commitment to the creative and dialogical construction of history. God does not impassively endow man with his unconditional good but co-creates life with him. On the other hand, the process of becoming fully human is only possible in this relationship with God, a relationship of love, defined as the joy of existence and the desire for good to others. Withdrawal, fear of relationships and lack of commitment not only means wasting the potential for creation, but above all not taking responsibility for the world⁴⁸. A believer, together with the experience of the faith, is involved in the service that God expects. According to the French philosopher, "Adherence to the Christian faith is not in any sense a privilege [...] but an additional commission, a responsibility, a new work"⁴⁹. In the view of the French Christian anarchist, this service is connected with the effort of resistance, contestation, opposition to all oppression, domination and coercion. Although most religions in history have been an excuse or pretext for wars, and the worst possible atrocities have been committed in the name of God, in Ellul's opinion, the need for a believer to remain faithful to the practice of faith in the spirit of love and justice remains unchanged. He claims that

The truth is not a set of dogmas or decisions of papal synods. It is not doctrine. It is not even the Bible considered as a book. The Truth is a Person! It is not a question, then, of adhering to the Christian doctrine. It is a question of trusting the person who speaks to us. Christian truth can be grasped, heard, and received only in and by faith⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ M. Patalon, *Pedagogika ekumenizmu*, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁸ See ibidem, p. 55.

⁴⁹ J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 26.

In his declarations and actions, Ellul is dead against the use of violence. His anarchism is

pacifist, antinationalist, anti-capitalist, moral, and antidemocratic anarchism (i.e., that which is hostile to the falsified democracy of bourgeois states). There remains the anarchism which acts by means of persuasion, by the creation of small groups and networks, denouncing falsehood and oppression, aiming at a true overturning of authorities of all kinds as people at the bottom speak and organize themselves⁵¹.

In the face of the radical fight against the emblems of power of some over others, the fight against the “conformist society”⁵² by the ubiquitous state, bureaucracy, and propaganda, which make us all “producers and consumers”⁵³, the philosopher calls for stirring doubt and organisation on the margins of mainstreams:

Most people, living heedlessly, tanning themselves, engaging in terrorism, or becoming TV slaves, ridicule political chatter and politics. They see that there is nothing to hope for from them. They are also exasperated by bureaucratic structures and administrative bickering. If we denounce such things, we gain the ear of a large public. In a word, the more the power of the state and bureaucracy grows, the more the affirmation of anarchy is necessary as the sole and last defence of the individual, that is, of humanity⁵⁴.

The author opposes participation in any political game which, instead of pushing for real changes in society, is entangled in complex networks of mutual interests and dependencies, in complex and unclear organisational structures, and thus opposes participation in local and central government elections. He is convinced that anarchy is above all “conscientious objection”⁵⁵, which results in a much broader opposition than a boycott of elections: it is an opposition to taxes, compulsory vaccinations, mandatory education, in a word – opposition to the omnipresence of the state. An interesting example of effective functioning on the outskirts of the state is the order that was established at the time when he himself was a “refugee”⁵⁶ in a French village. At that time, he was a law student and, having gained the trust and friendship of the inhabitants, provided them with “legal services”, which had no legal

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 12.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 18.

force under the law, but which were treated by the interested parties as legally binding and decisive as official letters.

In his references to biblical texts, the French philosopher consistently tries to expose not so much the abuse of power (this has already found its infamous expression in historical, sociological and political studies of religious research), but power as such. Ellul's earlier criticism of the "monarchic" traditional readings of biblical texts is part of an anarchist tradition that is succinctly expressed in the following words: "neither God, nor master"⁵⁷.

He believes that the biblical God should be read first of all through the prism of the Book of Exodus, rather than Genesis; the former is the key to understanding God's way of acting in the world⁵⁸, as the Liberating God: "The Biblical God is above all the one who liberates us from all bondage, from the anguish of living and the anguish of dying. Each time that he intervenes it is to give us again the air of freedom"⁵⁹. For this purpose, as Ellul proves, God gave the people of Israel the Decalogue: not as one would think to control it or to use moral coercion against man, but as a kind of map with landmarks and boundaries to separate life from death. In this way, a free person with this map is given the opportunity to move responsibly around the world: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Dt 30: 15, 19). God – Liberator – Love is on the side of man's freedom and wants his empowerment, commitment and action in his interest. He is not, as Ellul consistently maintains in his reflections, a God interested in the relations of power and subjection. It is man who searches for power, desires it and gets entangled in it. The biblical story of the chosen people is an almost constant testimony to the crisis and the demoralisation of power, evidence of how much it depraves those in its possession, how it initially deceives and then anaesthetises and blinds, leading to destruction and death. The very few examples of "good rulers" are considered by the author as exceptions to the rule.

⁵⁷ Authorship of this famous statement is ascribed to the nineteenth-century French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui. We know that it was emblazoned on the side of the Titanic, which later gave rise to tempestuous debates in religious communities on God who "would not be laughed at" and in a spectacular manner interferes with the history of human atheistic pride.

⁵⁸ At the same time, he points to the earlier creation of the Book of Exodus than the Book of Genesis as the key to his position. He is to develop this thesis in the book of his own authorship: *Ethique de la liberté* (vol. 3, Geneva 1975-1984) (c.f. J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 38).

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 39.

In the analyses of biblical texts presented in the essay, Ellul reinterprets several stories related to the subject of power. Among the stories of the New Testament, he looks at, among other things, the stories of the Gospel – a miracle with a coin in the fish’s muzzle, the apprehension and trial of Jesus, as well as the figure of the Beast of the Apocalypse of St. John and fragments from Paul’s letter to the Romans. In an interesting way he also takes up the story from Mark’s Gospel, in which the followers of King Herod ask him a provocative question about whether it is allowed or not to pay Caesar’s tax (Mk 12:13-17). Jesus says well-known words there: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”. These words are most often interpreted as legitimizing the separation of church and state, without calling into question the claims of any of these subjects. Meanwhile, the interpretation proposed by Ellul completely changes the reading of the story.

The philosopher points first of all to the irony contained in Jesus’ statement. The sign on the coin, which becomes a pretext for conversation with the Pharisees and the Herodians, the Emperor’s sign, is a sign of ownership, a sign of possession, commonly used in the Roman Empire. In his characteristic style, Ellul compares it to cattle brands in the American West in the 19th century⁶⁰. He points out that the Roman holder of the designated good was only a temporary owner. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent the designated good from being surrendered to its rightful owner. However, this good is a pathetic testimony to the real power of the Emperor and its actual limits. While money, monuments, and some altars belong to him, is there anything else that is his? All the unmarked rest simply does not belong to him. All the rest belongs to God. As Ellul observes:

This is where the real conscientious objection arises. Caesar has no right whatever to the rest. First, we have life. Caesar has no right of life and death. Caesar has no right to plunge people into war. Caesar has no right to devastate and ruin a country. Caesar’s domain is very limited. We may oppose most of his pretensions in the name of God⁶¹.

Ellul criticises all of the most characteristic interpretative traditions of reading the fragments of the New Testament, proposing new versions of their “translations”, taking into account anarchistic assum-

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 59.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 60-61.

ptions. He points to the biblical lack of justification for the creation of the state apparatus and the legitimacy of power, to the unfounded, erroneous and disastrous absolutization by the Christian tradition of the words: "All power comes from God". Finally, he points to the tendency to conformism and passivity, common in the Bible, as mechanisms conducive to subjectivity and tyranny. He shows Jesus as a "guerrilla"⁶², a distanced, intelligent free thinker who skilfully uses irony, mockery or provocation, who efficiently uses understatement, is able to sow doubt and give food for thought. He is not a revolutionary insurgent, but an anarchist, aware of his goals and shunning violence.

The strong stress on his own opinion, contrasted with that of others, the emotional tone, the highlighting of sensitive and disputable issues, the ostentatious distancing himself from critics, the frequent use of exclamation marks and the imperative mood – all these measures and stylistic means shown in the language used can be read as an expression of the author's commitment and bias. Ellul speaks "from himself", despite the declared minimum (waiting only for "being listened to"), appears to be a strong advocate of reasons defined by the program, a radical pedagogue with a definite vision of a better world. This is the expression of his ideological intransigence and the utopian aspect of his demands: "Anarchy must regain its pungency and courage. It has a bright future before it. This is why I adopt it"⁶³.

CONCLUSION

General education as a discourse creates an inclusive space for numerous heterogeneous and incompatible voices. This inclusiveness at the same time imposes obligations in the area of its tasks. As Joanna Rutkowiak emphasized this issue in the 1990s: "Understanding the identity of pedagogy as a map of multiple qualities and multilingualism requires a multiplication of the cognitive work necessary to identify the quality that makes up this multiplicity and to follow the changes taking place in this area"⁶⁴. Both critical pedagogy and pedagogy of religion are nowadays supported by an extensive tradition and fully legitimate fields of independent pedagogical theories. For the development of general

⁶² See *ibidem*, p. 51.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁶⁴ J. Rutkowiak, "Wielość języków pedagogiki a problem jej tożsamości", [in:] *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki. Wybór tekstów*, ed. T. Jaworska, R. Leppert, Kraków 2001, p. 15.

pedagogy, the impulses that allow it to problematize their borderland are of crucial importance.

Jacques Ellul's statements from his essay *Anarchy and Christianity* presented in this article, and in particular their language and the issues they address: authority, power, freedom, resistance, emancipation, anarchy, seem to situate this concept in the field of interest of critical pedagogy. Its fundamental postulates articulated by the authority of contemporary supporters of this direction, the American pedagogue Henry A. Giroux, can also be applied to Ellul's concept:

radical pedagogy needs a vision – one that celebrates not what is but what could be; that looks beyond the immediate to the future and links struggle to a new set of human possibilities. This is a call for a concrete utopianism. It is a call for alternative modes of experience, public spheres that affirm one's faith in the possibility of creative risk-taking, of engaging life so as to enrich it; it means appropriating the critical impulse so as to lay bare the distinction between reality and the conditions that conceal its possibilities⁶⁵.

With his criticism of the interpretative order dominating in the Christian tradition, with the practice of exposing the ideological interests responsible for this state of religious institutions, as well as with his overt revolutionary and anarchist social project, Ellul is a perfect match for the tradition of critical pedagogy in its emancipatory version.

At the same time, as a theologian declaring his religious position and undertaking in fact religious interpretations of biblical texts from a Christian perspective, he fits equally well into the tradition of religious pedagogy or the pedagogy of religion. Opposing conservative interpretations of Christian revelation, this enthusiast of religious anarchism will certainly not gain recognition within the catechetical, kerygmatic, built on the confessional dogma of religious pedagogy, but in the hermeneutical or critical aspects of religious pedagogy, honouring the conflict of various interpretations and reconciled with the impossibility of establishing their common denominator.

Therefore, if the task of general pedagogy is to recognize, reconstruct and integrate ideas filling numerous spaces of pedagogical thinking, then undertaking attempts to confront and review some intellectual traditions via others, carefully looking at places of contact and intersections of paths identified so far with separate theories,

⁶⁵ H. A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education. A Pedagogy of the Opposition*, Massachusetts 1983, p. 242.

tracking semantic diffusions and mutual penetration of topics can be considered as fully legitimate research activities in the field of pedagogical discipline in its meta-perspective.

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Abstract:

For general pedagogy, the concept of Jacques Ellul is an important example of solving the tension between religious and critical-emancipation engagement, which are usually involved in the theory of education in a separate way. We are able to give many examples of educational trends or ideologies that are within religious education and that dogmatically defend against criticism, as well as critical education, which in principle distrusts communities that are based on confessional devotion to religious principles and practices. Hence the Ellul's concept that links Christianity and anarchy, from the perspective of general pedagogy is an important complement to its efforts to create a map of directions and currents of contemporary pedagogy.

Keywords:

anarchy, Christianity, Jacques Ellul, general pedagogy, critical pedagogy, pedagogy of religion

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See also:

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