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**Tadeusz Belerski, *Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu*, Vol. 1
Wydawnictwo Meissner & Partners, Warszawa 2013**

**Tadeusz Belerski, *Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu. Słońce za serce*, Vol. 2
Wydawnictwo Międzynarodowej Kapituły Orderu Uśmiechu, Warszawa 2020**

There are many different honors and orders that are more or less recognizable in the world. It happens that we see someone receiving such a distinction. The mass media have made us accustomed to ceremonies of awarding them by representatives of state authorities or other bodies. However, in this multitude and variety of honors and orders, there is one that is truly unique. This is because it is a gift from children to adults. This is the Order of the Smile. It is awarded to people who contribute to building a child-friendly world. "It can be given to any adult who helps and supports children. But it is the youngest who must appreciate it and submit a nomination to the International Chapter of the Order of the Smile" (Belerski).

The history of the Order of the Smile dates back to 1967, when a well-known Polish writer, Wanda Chotomska, recounted her meeting with an ill boy in "Kurier Polski". The boy suggested that the doctor taking care of him should be awarded some kind of an order/ the Order of the Smile? The idea met with great interest. A competition for the design of the Order of the Smile was announced, to which forty-four thousand propositions from children were submitted. The first prize was awarded to nine-year-old Ewa Chrobak from Głuchołazy. The next step was to appoint the Chapter of the Order of the Smile, the chairman of which became Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina. The first recipient of the Order of the Smile was Professor Wiktor Dęga, a world-famous orthopaedist and founder of the Poznań school of orthopaedics and rehabilitation, in 1968. Children wrote about him that

in their suffering he can make them smile again. It should be emphasized that the medal is awarded not for the smile of an adult, but for their particular efforts that bring smiles to children's faces. So far over a thousand people have been awarded the Order of the Smile and each of them is a separate, unique story of service to children.

Some people say, and I personally agree with this opinion, that the Order of the Smile is the fulfillment of the will of Janusz Korczak. As it is known, he undertook a variety of initiatives to ensure that children are treated subjectively. In Korczak's understanding, this subjectivity meant, among others, the possibility for children to express themselves on matters that concern them. Without a shadow of a doubt it can be stated that this Polish pedagogue of Jewish origin is one of the highest moral authorities and deserves to be called the greatest friend of children. In his short statement: "A child is a human being", J. Korczak contained a fundamental thought upon which he built a timeless concept of children's rights. The Korczak's concept of upbringing is saturated with deep humanism and imbued with intransigence, courage and moral experience. That is why, as emphasized by Wiesław Theiss, a renowned Polish researcher of Korczak's work, this "responsible and committed humanism is a source of opportunity and hope for us, people of the global age. In today's 'liquid modernity', the world of sudden and rapid changes, Korczak and his work can help in the search for what is permanent: models of moral order, responsibility for the common future, clear educational ideals, valuable content and forms of education for the young generation" (Theiss 2012, p. 8–9).

The publication by Tadeusz Belerski entitled *Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu* (Eng. *Knights of the Order of the Smile*) consists of two parts. As a matter of fact, these are two separate books under the same title. The first one was published in 2013, the second in 2020. In order to distinguish them, the author gave the second one a subtitle: *Słońce za serce* (Eng. *The sun for a heart*).

The two volumes are a collection of biographies of adults who have been honored by children for their work that brings them happiness and smile. The first volume from 2013 was intended by the author to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Order of the Smile. It contains 56 biographical portraits of the Knights of the order. The second volume, published in 2020, introduces another 43 Knights of the Order of the Smile. Each person presented in both publications is a unique character and a separate life story. Among them there are both popular names as well as little known and sometimes even anonymous people. They represent various professions or worldviews... Paradoxically, however, this diversity unites rather than divides them. What they also have in common is a profound need to serve children, resulting from some kind of a moral imperative to support the youngest. For the sake of editorial accuracy, I would like to add that the order of the biographies is alphabetical. Perhaps this is to prevent the reader from having the impression that the author favors certain figures.

Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu is an example of a valuable project of historiographic value. The substantive identity of the field of interest in question is firmly established. T. Belerski gives the voice to the heroes themselves to tell the story of their lives and their efforts to help children. We can therefore speak of a certain layer of reconstruction and presentation of biographical events that create an image of a given person honored by them. The result is a kind of a map of individual traits and predispositions, values, personal references to the surrounding reality, motivation systems, considered both in the context of life choices and professional work. Biographical knowledge characterized in this way certainly allows us to see specific individual conditions and events that have become the basis of future work for the benefit of children. The biographies of the children's heroes highlight the diversity of motifs that guided them in their altruistic efforts. It is often observed that the need and willingness to help children originated from their family home, where they have witnessed the commitment of their loved ones to serve others from an early age. In this way the attitude of solidarity, empathy and readiness to actively participate in social life has been shaped in them.

It is a truism to say that human life is a biography. T. Belerski, with journalistic inquisitiveness, will present the reader with a reliable picture of every person awarded by children with the Order of the Smile. In the educational dimension, these biographies become particularly relevant as an important area of overlapping of certain regularities and processes. The Knights share their stories and experiences, both personal and professional, thereby gaining an educational value. This is because their narratives have historical, cognitive, social and, finally, didactic aspects. After all, the task of modern pedagogy, especially didactics, is not just any learning, but learning as an internal experience.

It is worth considering what message emerges from the portraits presented by T. Belerski. One of the advantages of the publication in question is the depiction of the lives of people guided by the idea of the good of the child and contributing to that good on a daily basis. In the modern world, the dynamics of changing perceptions and impressions hinder our orientation and choosing what is most important. Incorrect understanding of freedom (free "from" and not "to") and the need for a variety of experiences results in a desire to free oneself from traditions, authorities or social control of lifestyle, entails consequences such as deracination, loneliness and a sense of insecurity. Among the dangers one should point out that we are succumbing to the pressure of constant novelty, which seems to be an opportunity to improve the quality of life. In this way, man refuses to acknowledge the value of almost everything and forgets what was previously perceived as valuable and respectable behavior. The perils posed by spiritual and social deracination can lead to hedonistic and egocentric attitudes. In this context, presenting the profiles of the Knights of the Order of the Smile as uncompromising, sensitive, empathetic people, open to the needs of others, especially children, is something extremely important. Their testimony to life brings the modern world

back to normality. They even seem to be a little confused that what should be normal is elevated to such a high level as something extraordinary. This is because man's internal balance depends on the presence of universal values, or stable points of support, in the living environment. It seems that the antidote to these negative processes is to build a world that is child-friendly, starting with the family environment, which begins to shape a lasting core of individual attitudes based on love, security and kindness. In the words of one of the Knights of the Order of the Smile – St. John Paul II: “Concern for the child is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another. For the child is the crucial point around which the morality of families and, consequently, the morality of entire nations and societies is shaped or broken. The dignity of the child demands the highest degree of social responsibility in every respect” (John Paul II 1985).

The life stories presented in the publication *Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu* demonstrate the relationship between the individual's fate and the wider social reality. In pedagogy, this is extremely important. Its practice and theory are greatly influenced by the life stories of such educators as Janusz Korczak, St. John Bosco and others. These great educators have treated the child in line with the humanistic and personalistic perspective, as a person. Such approach meant that the little human being had its own dignity and freedom, which in educational practice required dialogue, understanding and cooperation. A common characteristic of the pedagogical practice of these outstanding educators was “wise [pedagogical] love”. These traits are contained in contemporary humanistic pedagogy based on the understanding of the child, trust and dialogue with the child (Theiss 2012).

It is my hope that the publication titled *Kawalerowie Orderu Uśmiechu* will contribute to further reflection and in-depth research into the subjectivity of the child. As emphasized by Bogusław Śliwerski, the acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the child as a human being is of fundamental importance. When using the term “person” we think of something that is undefined and unexplored, “[...] which involves the mystery of being, the world itself. Respecting this mysteriousness is at the same time respecting the other person” (Śliwerski 2007, p. 119). Conducting research focused on the child as a person is one of the basic pedagogical trends continuing the idea of child-centered education. The path of reflection in finding the truth about the child, its understanding and development, teaches the researcher humility, first and foremost.

The mysteriousness mentioned above requires the educator to gather the crumbs of this truth with great care and perseverance. Questions such as: “Who is the child really?”, “Who is the child as a consumer of various content introduced by adults?”, “What does building a happy childhood mean?”, “What does the subjectivity of the child mean in educational practice?”, should prompt all adults concerned about the future of the young generation to seek always and exclusively the good of the child. Surely the institution that the Order of the

Smile has become is a manifestation of children's subjectivity, as it gives them the opportunity to exercise their own rights, such as the right of choice, the right to speak and the right to express themselves, in practice. Children's rights are the joint responsibility of all adults and still remain an educational task.

References

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