



Janusz Mariański, *Godność ludzka—wartość doceniona czy puste słowo? Studium socjopedagogiczne*.  
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With respectable consequence, Rev. Prof. Janusz Mariański—distinguished sociologist of morality, sociologist of religion and spirituality, recently granted with the dignity of doctor honoris causa of the University of Silesia—leads an orderly and multilateral sociological contemplation of the issue of human dignity. Currently, in his fourth book, he has thoroughly prepared and submitted for discussion the results of analyses concerning various aspects of the issue of human dignity, which are of a significant cognitive value.

Janusz Mariański presents an insightful and multilateral analysis of the issue of dignity. He includes the leading theme in the title, which constitutes an aptly formulated, rhetorically sophisticated and provoking in-depth, reflective question about dignity—“an appreciated value or an empty word?”, also concentrating on the issue of education to dignity.

By realizing a research program that focuses on the issue of dignity and developing, we might say, sociology of dignity, Mariański follows the path of high intellectual demands set by Maria Ossowska (1896–1974), an outstanding expert in the theory and history of morality. In his subsequent monographs on dignity, Mariański approvingly refers to Ossowska’s analyses and theses. From the point of view of the interests of the sociology of morality, she used to pay close attention to the cognitively interesting and practically significant issue of dignity. A proper approach to these issues requires the researcher to demonstrate a high level of humanistic culture within the area of research and reflection on morality. Humanistic culture of such a quality is presented by the author of the monograph. The book *Godność ludzka—wartość doceniona czy puste*

*słowo? Studium socjopedagogiczne* [Human Dignity—An Appreciated Value or an Empty Word? Socioeducational Study] not only pursues a research program focused on the issue of dignity, but also constitutes a program of research aimed at the promotion of human dignity, especially in education.

In the Introduction, Mariański presents the research idea in a systematized form. He emphasizes the need and legitimacy of sociological research concerning dignity. At the same time, he notices that “the authors of the concept of ‘dignity’ in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* emphasize that it can be considered in psychological, philosophical, religious, and legal aspects, but do not mention sociological aspects” (p. 15). Not only does Mariański postulate such research, but he himself consistently studies these aspects. He draws attention to the omissions in sociological research: “Human dignity as a value is rarely subject to sociological analysis. Sociologists’ fears [...] result from the fact that dignity and the phenomena associated with this concept cannot be easily empirically verified, they are connected with the ethical and religious context, unjustified valuing and even moralizing in this field are very easy. Undertaking sociological research on human dignity, we are aware of all these dangers, but we try to focus, above all, on a reliable analysis of what is understood by the notion of human dignity in the contemporary Polish society, what environmental differences exist and what are the perceived manifestations of promoting or destroying this dignity in social life” (p. 24). As one of the inspirations for such targeted research, Mariański refers to the book *The Dignity of the Human Person as a Basis of Human Rights*, in which Franciszek Janusz Mazurek presents his own lecture on this subject.

Janusz Mariański is aware that in relation to the notion of dignity we are facing an undesirable phenomenon of *concept inflation*—as Andrzej Bronk claims—and the word dignity, has become ambiguous in each of the many fields of its use: theology, philosophy, anthropology, ethics, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and legal sciences.

In its ideological function, the concept of the dignity of man is invoked by various political parties, which otherwise differ in all other aspects, as a popular media slogan and a tool of political struggle. If the political left and right, conservatives and liberals, believers and non-believers, invoke the dignity of man, they cannot have the same thing in mind. Something else must be proclaimed by those who claim that man has an inalienable dignity which he owes to God, and something else must be proclaimed by those who, seeing man purely biologically as an evolutionary creature of nature, consider his dignity to be a value that derives from a cultural or social (institutional) giving (Andrzej Bronk) (p. 16).

Mariański also quotes the over-optimistic, even naive and even harmful, conviction that dignity “belongs to those notions which the whole world understands

without the need to define” (p. 17). In various cultural and ideological contexts, the issue of human dignity is not an obvious one, and even the value of human dignity is denied and depreciated systematically.

Janusz Mariański’s research is guided by the assumption that was aptly expressed by Ija Lazari-Pawłowska: “Our moral intuitions dictate that we must give the intrinsic value to every human individual, take into account his autonomous good in action; no man in his existence should be downgraded to a thing” (p. 20). In quoting this ethical assumption, Mariański expresses his solidarity with its message and concluding the Introduction he formulates an explicit appeal: “Let us save, realize and strengthen it [human dignity] as a fundamental value in building a successful individual life and a decent and good society” (p. 27).

The book under review has a well-prepared and transparent structure. The titles of the chapters and paragraphs were properly defined. Chapter I, Personal, Personality and Private Dignity, includes an analysis and various aspects of the concept (i.e., theological, philosophical, psychosociological, and social situations that threaten dignity). Chapter II, The Concept of Human Dignity and the Ways in Which It Is Justified, contains the following subchapters: 1. The sources and dimensions of human dignity; 2. Justification of human dignity; and 3. Assessment of own sense of dignity. Chapter III, Individual and Social Situations Threatening Human Dignity, contains: 1. Situations that threaten human dignity, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church; 2. Individual situations that threaten human dignity; 3. Social situations that threaten human dignity. Chapter IV, Education for Dignity Values, contains: 1. The concept of moral education; 2. Human dignity is the basis of moral education; 3. Pro-dignity education in practice. It is complemented by a rich Bibliography, a testimony of an excellent erudition.

The book *Godność ludzka—wartość doceniona czy puste słowo? Studium socjopedagogiczne* [Human Dignity—An Appreciated Value or an Empty Word? Socioeducational Study], whose author is also a Roman Catholic cleric, should be addressed as an obligatory book for priests and preachers, since the issue of dignity is at the center of their mission, the ministry of prophesying. The issue of dignity and its dangers in pastoral and preaching activity is well known to Rev. Józef Tischner. He juxtaposes two different approaches to human dignity, that is, depreciating or affirmative, which are present in the preaching narratives. The first one depreciating dignity looks as follows: “[...] a priest goes to the pulpit, has a crowd of people in front of him, in this crowd he can see above all sinners. Just like a tailor who walks down the street and sees mostly badly sewn clothes, or the dentist who looks at a man’s smile and sees mostly holes in his teeth, so does the priest, looking at people, sees above all sin. [...] the scene of the crucifixion becomes [...] a motive to humiliate man. That was very often the case” (p. 344). By humiliating man’s dignity the preacher in-

strumentalizes and depreciates what, from the point of view of his religion, is meant to be a particular kind of holiness. The right approach to the scene of the crucifixion, according to Rev. Tischner, is to see that there is an act of affirmation of human dignity: “We look at the crucifix and say: people look, look at how precious you are, [...] since the Son of God died on the cross for you. It is possible to approach the same scene either by humiliating the dignity of man, or by emphasizing that dignity” (p. 344). Following Rev. Tischner’s thought: “It is better for a preacher not to go to the pulpit if he does not read with understanding and familiarize himself with the content of Rev. Mariański’s book about the value of human dignity. Within this context, we may ask to what extent the motivation to write this socioeducational study, strongly exposing the value of human dignity, was a result of coming across such pastoral and preaching activity which humiliates human dignity instead of, as, among others, Osowska, Lazari-Pawłowska, Wojtyła-Tischner, and Mariański unanimously agree, properly emphasizing it.

The book is recommended as an almost obligatory reading for a wide range of people interested in the issue of human dignity. I recommend it as an original and important voice of the distinguished sociologist and humanist in the debate on understanding human dignity.

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