

The relationships between world's great religions as well as new religious movements or esoteric organizations and education are nothing new. There are not only schools run by religious associations, but also popular trends in alternative pedagogy entirely created by esotericists, such as the Waldorf pedagogy created by Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy, and based on its metaphysical theories. Why do religions and various currents of spirituality undertake educational activities? For many reasons. Apart from strictly religious ones, they propagate various philosophical concepts of man himself, his ontological constitution and the goal that he should achieve in his life, so educational institutions are supposed to help achieve these goals.

What do the founder of Waldorf pedagogy, Maria Montessori, or Polish educators such as Janusz Korczak or Helena Radlińska have in common, apart from the passion for early education? Certainly an interest in alternative visions of pedagogy, its anti-authoritarian trends, but also an interest in Theosophy and participation in activities related to it. Although the nineteenth-century Theosophy and the later Anthroposophy of Steiner are today treated as two separate currents, not only their sources, but also the stories of their involvement in education were similar for a long time. Both pedagogies were created based on the visions of world and human promoted by esoteric schools, subordinated educational ideas to visions of human psychophysical development, and organized classes and schools based on clearly defined principles – Anthroposophical and Theosophical, respectively. Above all, however, they developed whole systems focused on education and upbringing, and not limited to children. With time, however, Waldorf (Anthroposophical) pedagogy became a recognized system, and Theosophical pedagogy has never been codified in this way, despite the fact that systematically developed ideas provided lasting foundation for a robust activity in the field of education, including schools founded by Theosophists around the world.

While researching the history and ideas of the Polish Theosophical movement before World War II, I observed that one topic, very important for Theosophists, was completely marginalized in academic research – upbringing. Not only have Theosophists devoted dozens of their own studies to it, but also they also published numerous translations of texts from abroad, reports on international pedagogical conferences, and reports on the organization of various education-related events in Poland – even if this is not the first topic we expect to find in the esoteric press. At Theosophical summer camps the caretaker of children was Janusz Korczak, a member of the Co-masonry Le Droit Humain, whose initiation path in the interwar period was based on a seven-step Theosophical concept.

Theosophy, which was largely responsible for the transmission of elements of the philosophical and religious systems of the East in the West in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in their broad, non-academic reception, also promoted a special vision of childhood. Instead of being born as a blank page, Theosophists saw the new-born entity as a human being with a small body but with a centuries-old, experienced soul. In the Theosophical concept of evolution, the child might in some respects be at a higher level of development than the guardian, and this was to happen more and more frequently as the New Era (Age) approached. The role of the parent and educator could not be to shape their charge according to their own discretion, but to accompany them on the way and to learn together from each other. Regardless of the sources of such beliefs, in the nineteenth century such views on the essence of educational relations were indeed progressive, and the later activities of Theosophists - such as the anti-colonial activity of Annie Besant and the university she organized in India – were controversial for many. There was political taboo, and religious taboo too; Theosophy as a deliberately eclectic form of religion, a mystical current, an esoteric initiatory organization, was far from the dominant religious forms in both East and West. On the other hand, the Theosophists were efficient organizationally. Among them was Beatrice Ensor, the initiator of *Education for the New Era*, Theosophical Fraternity in Education and The New Education Fellowship, which was at the root of UNESCO. Neither of these Theosophical organizations has been thoroughly analysed in terms of ideas, nor has the Theosophical Education Trust. An important aspect of my project is the systematization of existing studies, as well as archival research of source materials, allowing for the ordering of the ideas of Theosophical pedagogy in the world and in Poland, on the one hand, and the reconstruction of Theosophical activities for the organization of educational institutions on the other.

The aim of this project is therefore to reconstruct the theoretical aspects of Theosophical pedagogy on the basis of the anthropological, ontological and ethical assumptions of Theosophy in the late nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, as well as to review its practical implementation. The project is divided into three main parts – (1) theoretical-methodological, (2) history and ideas of Theosophical pedagogy in the world, and (3) the reception of these ideas and an overview of initiatives in Poland. The research to be undertaken in the project is largely based on archival sources and is important both for local and global research on the subject. The conducted research is aimed at analysing specific issues that will form the basis of publications in international journals, but also at creating a synthesis of this multi-threaded topic in the form of a monograph. The aim of the project is, on the one hand, to highlight the relationship of esotericism with pedagogy and capture the reception of Theosophical ideas in the educational space, but also to systematize information about the influence of this particular esoteric current on the Polish and world history of education.