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## The Christian symbolism of water and the spiritual formation of lifeguards

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DARIUSZ PATER

## THE CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM OF WATER AND THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF LIFEGUARDS

Man holds a central place in our daily reality and proper understanding of man helps us find out the motives of their actions. Man is a spiritual and physical being, as far as their ontic status is concerned, and a being who has senses and intellect, in terms of cognition. Therefore, they need symbols to help explain and introduce the spiritual reality and facilitate its understanding, which is important as the world around us is a vast area of converging symbols with the hidden, objective essence<sup>1</sup>.

According to the dictionary, a symbol is a notion, idea, sign or object which is associated with a different notion and its function is to replace the other phenomenon; it is often ambiguous.<sup>2</sup> Initially, a broken piece of a dice or a different object that fitted the rim of the other object was called a symbol. Friends and acquaintances gave each other the pieces of various items as gifts to facilitate their mutual recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej [The World of Christian Symbolism]*, transl. and ed. by W. Zakrzewska, P. Pachciarek, R. Turzyński, Warsaw 1990, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego [Dictionary of contemporary Polish language]*. ed. by B. Dunaj, Warsaw 1996, p. 1079.

In the figurative sense, symbols mean the objects that, for some reasons, make people think about something spiritual, as they have something in common with it.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the centuries, symbols had been most often used as means of expression by the Church Fathers, as they could easily be understood by people, especially those who could not read. In this way, symbols had become a certain language of images and events. As the time went by, various types of dicta had been associated with symbols, which was the reason why, apart from carrying deeply religious meanings, they also became an opportunity for merrymaking.

### **The symbolism of water**

Water has been essential for both peoples' and animals' lives. Its symbolism can have different meanings. One of the oldest records of human thought, i.e. the Bible, has many examples of water symbolism of the typological nature, and according to the views of the ancient and Egypt and Mesopotamia inhabitants, water was a primal cosmic element and the basis for all life.<sup>4</sup> The confirmation of this view could be found in the Old Testament, when the vast waters (the first ocean) were divided into the waters above the dome and under the

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<sup>3</sup> See D. Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej [The World of Christian Symbolism]*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Gajda-Krynicka, *Kosmogonie akwatywne [Aquatic cosmogonies]*, [in:] *Rzeki. Kultura – cywilizacja – historia [Rivers. Culture – Civilization – History]* ed. J. Kołtuniak, vol. 5, Katowice 1996, p. 25; J. Sochoń, *Spór o rozumienie świata. Monizujące ujęcie rzeczywistości w filozofii europejskiej. Studium historyczno-hermeneutyczne [Dispute on the world comprehension. Monistic view of reality in the European philosophy. The historical and hermeneutic study]*, Warsaw 1998, p. 123.

dome (Chapter 1,2.6-9), and the Holy Spirit infused water with the life-giving power, which created the world and all of its living creatures. In the Old Testament, wells and springs filled with water are commonly viewed as symbols of the spiritual and physical uplifting, as well as purification. Hence, water is the primal matter, the mother matter, from which God Father, via the power of his Word and the Holy Spirit, created the whole world.<sup>5</sup>

God Himself is “the source of the living water” (Jr 17, 13), “the well of salvation” for every Christian. The blessed, holy water is a necessary element of many different blessings and consecrations. In the Christian liturgy, water is mainly used in baptism, where its significance is most profound. The act of washing with water, accompanied by words, which constitutes baptism, purifies people from the Original Sin and their personal sins, it also makes them the participants in God’s nature and the adopted God’s children. Thus the baptised child’s adventure with Christianity begins (Rz 8,15; GA 4,5)<sup>6</sup>.

In the child baptism rituals, it is emphasized that water for baptising is to be natural and clean so that the sign could be authentic and also for reasons of hygiene. Baptismal font or vessel, in which the water for baptism is prepared, should be clean, beautiful and entirely worthy means of Christian rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Baptism evokes the symbols of

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<sup>5</sup> See M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych [Glossary of biblical images and symbols]*, transl. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1989, p. 270 -271

<sup>6</sup> See *Encyklopedia chrześcijańska, Historia i współczesność, 2000 lat nadziei [Christian encyclopaedia, history and modern days, 2000 years of hope]*, red. H. Witczyk, Kielce 2000, s.770.

<sup>7</sup> *Obrzędy chrztu dzieci dostosowane do zwyczajów diecezji polskich [The baptism rituals adapted to the tradition of Polish diocese]*, Katowice 1994, p. 15-16.

salvation and washing at the same time; those “reborn from water” (J 3,5) are compared to the people whom God rescued during the Deluge (1 P 3,20; see. 1 Cor 10,1-5). A reference to baptism and a symbol of spiritual purification, the act of dipping hands into the holy water and crossing oneself, for example before entering the church, is the custom that has been preserved and which emphasizes the right to fully participate in the Church prayer and the Holy Mass.

The lack of water, especially on the desert, where its sources were scarce, increased its importance and value, while sharing water supply with a guest or even an unknown stranger was considered as a kind gesture and the expected sign of hospitality, since water for the thirsty means coming back to life. (Hi 22,7; Mt 10,42). It should also be remembered that water should not be refused even to an enemy (Proverbs 25, 21) because a cup of cold water given to one of the least of these brothers and sisters shall not remain unrewarded (Mt 10, 42). The feeling of thirst consists in the need to provide the body with the life-sustaining liquid, and in the metaphorical meaning, this is this feeling related to the lack of the life-giving water, namely God, while the feeling of thirst itself has been assigned the meaning of striving for (demanding) the social justice.<sup>8</sup>

The healing properties were attributed to some kind of water (J 5,1-7), whereas other types of water were considered to have the destructive properties and cause diseases (2 Krl 2,19-21). According to the Babylonian religion, the creative power, combined with fertility and life resided in the fresh water, while the chaos, destruction and evil were attributable to the

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<sup>8</sup> See M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych* [*Glossary of biblical images and symbols*], op. cit., p. 185.

restless and raging sea. The power of the sea itself is also reflected in many of the apocalyptic scriptures. The “sweet or bitter” water is mentioned in the context of man’s speech. The blessing is treated as sweet water, while the curse or blasphemy is the bitter water from the spring (Jk 3, 10n)

Different symbols are attached to the water drops mixed with wine in the chalice. This is supposed to be associated with the connection of the believers (water) with Christ (wine). Other interpretation suggests that this should be related to the wounds in Jesus’ side, from which water and blood flew together (J 13, 34)<sup>9</sup>.

A ritual of sprinkling a person with the holy water, which is perceived as the symbolic act of conveying strength, power and life, has a significant meaning in the Christian symbolism. Reference to water also appears in many biblical metaphors and similes concerning, for example, the instability (Chapter 49,4), loss of strength (Hi 3,24; Ps 22,15) or fear (Joshua 7,5).

To sum up, it should be pointed out that the symbolism of water is deeply ingrained in the Holy Scriptures and it emphasizes God’s might and power and believers’ trust. It may be also due to its connection with nature, life and health that certain universal and timeless values are attributable to water, which results in the multiplicity of water symbol interpretations.

Over the centuries, artists, painters and writers, as well as clergymen, including Church Fathers, often eagerly made use of such motives as: the sea, anchors, storms, tempests, helms, sails, fish and fishermen. They had explained the texts of the Holy Bible so that they could be understood by all and evoke emotions. They had discovered, at the same time, the value of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 271.

nature and truly enjoyed it, while spending properly their free time, the clergymen leisure included.

### **The symbolism of water and the idea of water sports**

Sport is an extremely popular element in the human life. Its definition indicates that sport is always a human activity, which is performed individually or in a team, therefore, it seems necessary to understand the nature of sport, its functions and goals. The Catholic theology distinguishes between: an action of a human being (*actiohominis*) and a human action (*actiohumana*). Hence, it should be considered whether all of the forms and elements of contemporary sport are authentic human actions, i.e. those correlating with humanity, its purposefulness, ethical and social responsibility, as well as dignity. The Christian philosophy is closely linked to the ontological, social and axiological personalism. The contemporary continuation of the Christian personalism is Pope John Paul II's anthropology, which positively evaluates the role of corporality throughout the entire human life and is open to the physical culture values, and therefore proves to be a valuable inspiration for the people related to sports.<sup>10</sup>

Z. Dziubiński called John Paul II the sower of truth, goodness and love, a person who brings out greatness in everyone, and on this foundation he strived to build the future. He considered the pope as the person who loves sportsmen and they

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<sup>10</sup> See Z. Dziubiński, *Czy antropologia Jana Pawła II jest otwarta na wartości kultury fizycznej?* [*Is the anthropology by John Paul II open to the values of physical culture?*] "Kultura Fizyczna [*Physical Culture*]" 1989, no. 3-4, p. 8-11.

loved him, despite telling them difficult truth and expecting much from them. The pope demanded fairness, goodness and brotherly love to be the foundations of sport and he restored the importance of sport and affirmed its values by emphasizing that it serves man and their development, shaping their moral and spiritual life. He viewed sport and physical exercises as having the anthropo-creative values, as they enhanced the development of an individual and society.<sup>11</sup>

It should be pointed out that sport is the basic form of physical culture, which in turn constitutes an essential part of culture in the broad sense. Culture is a human vocation and human duty is to shape different forms of culture. The issue of cultural activity is considered in terms of the uniqueness of an individual. This is the property of the human being and their spirit. Undoubtedly, the conditions and context of human activity has an impact on the shape of culture.<sup>12</sup>

There are different cultural forms, including physical, agrarian, technical and industrial, scientific, artistic, moral or religious culture, all of which are complementary and it would be a mistake to separate or juxtapose them. Man is an ontic whole and this is why different sectors of culture created by them should be always focused on their development. The true culture consists in humanizing people, i.e. their multidirectional development: physical, intellectual, artistic and moral. The Christian philosophy of culture, which originates from

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<sup>11</sup> See Z. Dziubiński, *Jan Paweł II- siewca prawdy, dobra i miłości* [*John Paul II-the sower of truth, goodness and love*], [in:] *Sport jako kulturowa rzeczywistość* [*Sport as a Cultural Reality*]. Z.Dziubiński, Warsaw 2005, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Niewęglowski, *Kultura, religia, sport: współzależności* [*Culture, religion, sport: interdependencies*], [in:] *Sport jako kulturowa rzeczywistość* [*Sport as a Cultural Reality*], op. cit., p. 138.



personalism, objects to the unilateral or even reductionist concepts of culture. Therefore, if the physical culture and sport are to contribute to the good of a human being as an individual, moral and spiritual culture should not be ignored and especially opposed to. This personalistic view of culture is an integral whole, and this is why its products or actions connected with it cannot have a destructive impact on the individual “self”, moral sensitivity, conscience, personality and responsibility of a human being<sup>13</sup>.

The issue concerning the religious roots of sport should not be omitted and they can be found in the Greek tradition of agnostics. In the ancient Greece, sport was considered as “a ticket” to fame and it enabled entering the pantheon of fame and immortality, while the Olympic victory was a way to permanently enter the world of “sacrum”, thus gaining immortality. For the Greek, the Olympic games constituted a part of the worship, the informal liturgy, during which the gods were worshipped, prayed to and offered sacrifice, while the competitors gave oaths, in front of the Zeus altar, that they would compete fairly, avoid bribery and deceit. The place where the competitions were held was separate, holy and the atmosphere of service prevailed there. The priests were also present during the games. The specific type of outfit was the ritual nudity. The Olympic victory was a form of deification, as the poets sang the songs of glory to praise the heroes and used the expressions reserved exclusively for gods.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See S. Kowalczyk, *Filozofia kultury. Próba personalistycznego ujęcia problematyki* [*The philosophy of culture. An attempt for the personalistic view of the issues*], Lublin 1996, p. 13-51.

<sup>14</sup> See H. Zdebska, *Gra sportowa – między sacrum a profanum* [*Sport game – between the sacred and the profane*], [in:] *Drogi i bezdroża sportu i*

The Christian philosophy culture includes a number of valuable inspirations for physical culture and sport, while Christian symbolism of water fits into the idea of water sports. Man, after all, it is an inherent part of Nature, while water, together with plants and animals living in it, is an indispensable gift of life offered by Nature and which becomes a part of human body after drinking it.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, over the centuries water has been an unpredictable and dangerous element to man, who in different ways has tried to “tame” it by making it more accessible, so as to be able to practise different forms of physical activity involving the contact with water and which sometimes constitutes the object of competition.

### **Water rescue and its axiology**

Spending leisure time by the water, practising tourism and water sports is a very popular form of recreation in the summer period. Unfortunately, many hazards are associated with and they are most often connected with bravado, alcohol and the lack of imagination.

To ensure safety while spending leisure time, having fun or practising sports and water tourism, regardless of the type of the reservoir, those who make use of this type of active leisure need, first of all, to be cautious, despite the fact that lifeguards are there to guarantee their safety.

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*turystyki* [*Straight and winding paths of sports and tourism*]. Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 2007, p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Juskiewicz, *Akwatyczne stymulacje kulturowe* [*Aquatic Stimulation of Culture*], [in:] *Sport jako kulturowa rzeczywistość* [*Sport as a Cultural Reality*], op. cit., p. 162.

The water safety is associated with water rescue and the presence of lifeguards at the water basins of various types. However, it is necessary to consider how lifeguards are prepared to provide aid, as well as how equipment parameters are adjusted to conditions, for example, at the open or closed water basins.

The modern water rescue purchases more and more of state-of-the-art specialist equipment, however, nothing is going to replace man, who, in this case, undertakes the task of protecting human health and saving lives. At this point, it is also worth mentioning that water environment has salutary effects, it is a place to spend leisure and relax, and it has medicinal properties. The stay by the water is a perfect way to spend free time and to improve health, this is why nowadays people make use of almost all of the possibilities that water environment offers them.<sup>16</sup> This is especially important as recreation and sport carry many values, which are not only related to a pleasant way of spending leisure time, but also to active lifestyle in the near and further future, creating interest in sports and tourism and, in addition, such values greatly strengthen family bonds and can be regarded by parents as good investment, which will bring various benefits to themselves, their children and other family members.<sup>17</sup>

The sport disciplines, which are practised within the water reservoirs, and which are directly associated with them, are called water sports. They include, e.g. the sports water rescue. The participants of the competitions on the open and closed

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<sup>16</sup> See J. Salita, *Wprowadzenie. Woda jako środowisko realizacji różnych form rekreacji* [Introduction. Water as the environment for different leisure forms], [in:] *Rekreacja i fitness w wodzie* [Recreation and fitness in water]. J. Salita, Olsztyn 2000, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Ostrowski, *Zabawy i rekreacja w wodzie* [Fun and recreation in the water], Warsaw 2003.

water basins are men and women, who compete in separate teams most often consisting of four people and who are good swimmers and physically fit people. The sport competitions include individual and group runs on the beach, swimming races with rescue boards, the combination of swimming in the sea and running over the beach, rowing the rescue canoes and races in the rescue motor boats. At the swimming pools, there are swimming and rescue competitions, in which individual and groups can participate and in which the SP buoys, dummies, flippers and windlass with ropes are used. The high level of rescue sport encourages all of the water rescuers to improve their psychophysical skills.

The traditions of water rescue in Poland date back to the beginning of the 17th century and the earliest source of information is the record confirming that Hieronim Gostomski founded in Sandomierz a hospital and monastery, whose monks, among their other duties, rescued the victims of the Vistula river.<sup>18</sup> In the 17th century, the Rescue Service for the Drowning was established in Kraków and, moreover, the first publications promoting the swimming lessons and water rescue had begun to appear. The author the first one was Karol Hojnic. The emergence of regulations permitting the resuscitation, which came into force in the Kingdom of Poland in 1839, also played a significant role.

At the end of the 19th century, in 1894 the Emperor's Society for Rescuing the Drowning was created in Kalisz, and as part of its activity, it issued the guide on how to rescue the drowning. Its author, Leon Wernic included not only the medical instructions concerning the first aid, but also the regulations concerning swimming and making use of water reservoirs. In 1908, the Petersburg Society for Rescuing the

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.wopr.pl> (access 06.12.2013)

Drowning was set up in Warsaw, and it helped made use of water basins in the vicinity of Warsaw. Since 1926, the Commission for Water Rescue had been operating in Siemianowice and it passed a decision to establish the Polish Swimming Association. The Commission, already in 1927, made the 29th of June the Water Rescuer Day.

Gradually, the scope of these operating institutions had broadened and in 1952 the Water Rescue entered the curriculum of the Physical Education University in Warsaw. Mieczysław Witkowski, prof. dr hab., had undertaken the task of preparing the necessary teaching materials. After a few years, the teaching program of water rescue had appeared in all of the physical education high schools in Poland.<sup>19</sup>

WOPR (Volunteer Water Rescue Service)<sup>20</sup> was established under the regulation no. 74 by the Chairman of the National Physical Culture Committee of 11th of April 1962, and it gained legal personality on the 9th of October 1967, on the basis of the decision made by the Minister of Internal Affairs, while on the 8th of September 2006, in it was incorporated into the State Medical Rescue system under the Act on State Medical Rescue Services, Journal of Laws No. 06.191.1410.

To properly evaluate the actions and attitudes of people associated with sport in general, water rescue included, it is extremely important to indicate certain symbolism and to find the moral reference points, moral norms that determine the moral duties underlying human actions, which involves ethics.

The ethics of sport is defined as a “discipline that includes a set of issues connected with determining the moral duties (the moral good or evil), its detailed content (rightness), and

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.wopr.pl> (access 06.12.2013)

<sup>20</sup> WOPR: W – for bringing up, O – for organizing, P – for providing assistance, R – for rescue.

the final explanation of the moral duties related to actions, as well as the origin of moral evil (the moral fall) and the ways to overcome it<sup>21</sup>.

With regard to the WOPR members, the ethics applies to fulfilling the tasks in accordance with the professional knowledge, good manners, tact and loyalty towards the people with whom they work and who they rescue. In other words, it is about the moral attitude, typical of this profession and which a water rescuer confirms by saying the following words: "I hereby pledge to fulfil my duties conscientiously and with the full sense of moral responsibility."<sup>22</sup>

The water rescuers are devoted to the noble idea of providing assistance to the drowning and to those in need, for example during a flood, and they are a group cohesive enough to be called a social group, which is guided by the uniform moral values. The main task and obligation of lifeguards is to take care of the people who spend their leisure time by the water and to come to their aid if necessary, while at the same time respecting their dignity, which means acting in accordance with the commonly accepted principles of social coexistence. The area of the professional ethics of the WOPR members includes the need to improve professional qualifications, obtain additional competences, taking care of the physical fitness, and in particular focusing on good condition to swim, all of which makes the water rescuers, to a large extent, suitable for this profession<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> See T. Styczeń, *ABC etyki [ABC of ethics]*, Lublin 1981, p. 31-51.

<sup>22</sup> The text of the oath adopted by the resolution of the Board of WOPR of 4 December 2005, [in:] [www.slaskiewopr.pl](http://www.slaskiewopr.pl) (dostęp 23.12.2013).

<sup>23</sup> See P. Błasiak, M. Chadaj, K. Kurek, *Ratownictwo wodne. Vademecum [Water Rescue. Vademecum]*, Warsaw 2001, p. 161-162

The water rescuers feel connected by their hard and honourable work, in which they constantly strive for the climate of mutual trust. According to its articles of association, WOPR needs, first and foremost, to conduct educational activity, the aim of which is to increase the moral level and improve qualifications in the field of the water rescue. This is particularly important as the water rescuer profession is held in high regard in society and its position is becoming more and more significant, which in turn, imposes on them some special responsibilities, not only in their professional work.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the water rescue, thanks to its focus on the human being and its care for the water environment and its vicinity, has become one of the factors that also create the ecological values.

Water is an environment that may become a quasi-opponent or quasi-ally of human activities. As M. Juszkiwicz has pointed out – the human activity, performed in cooperation with water, provides the possibility to live through and enrich human experiences by the feeling of satisfaction resulting e.g. from overcoming the forces of nature, “while the water itself, in this perspective, becomes the co-creator of the hedonistic, agonistic, cognitive, ludic, emotional or aesthetic values”.<sup>25</sup>

While making an attempt to find the relationship between the symbolism of water and the idea of water sports, it is worth mentioning the rescuers’ struggle with the forces of nature when trying to save the drowning. Rescuers are ready to come to people’s aid, regardless of the weather conditions or the time of the day, thus giving testimony to the fact that man can count on other man in the difficult moments, which often involve the struggle with the extremely powerful elements. In

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p.170.

the case of water rescuers, who regard their work as a mission, the word ‘man’ has the greatest significance, though they do not always manage to win the fight against the element. But even in the moments of doubt, the rescue actions are always carried out till the end, because this is how the water rescuers treat their job, and thus they are always held in high regard for their professionalism, courage, determination to fight against the elements and to rescue every human life. This is an occupation that requires from man high professionalism, combined with physical fitness and psychological resistance. At this point, it seems appropriate to quote an excerpt from the anthem of the Volunteer Water Rescue Service by Andrzej Malinowski:

*“At the lazy river or treacherous lake,  
at the boundless sea or on ice that could easily break  
we act and we stand still for public good,  
and upon the word “rescue” we swim as far as we could.*

*The rescuers are life savers,  
when the elements are raging or sun casts its rays,  
they seek no reward nor fame,  
helper is their second name.”<sup>26</sup>*

### **Sport and man’s spiritual development**

Sport, as already mentioned, has a positive effect on the life of a human being and society. From the individualistic perspective, it improves health, strengthens the body and

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<sup>26</sup> [www.wopr.pl](http://www.wopr.pl) (access 23.12.2013)



stimulates healthy competition, as well as effort-taking, and it also creates the human need to help others. The document provisions of the Portugal Episcopate Conference, sport is viewed as the element reinforcing such personal features as: honesty, altruism, respect for other person, as without these features sport would be only pointless effort, a mindless manifestation of physical force, while on the other hand, physical and moral development makes it possible to derive joy and satisfaction from it, thus encouraging to follow the God's ways<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, sport is certainly a cultural phenomenon in the contemporary world, it is an aesthetic value per se and it helps people shape the system of values and strengthen the spirit.<sup>28</sup>

The etymology of the term *asceticism* goes back to the classic and Greek culture. The Greek word *askeo* means the process of shaping, the exercises and trainings and the word *asketes* was used to describe a man who is proficient in a given domain.<sup>29</sup>. Eventually, the notion of "asceticism" was assigned a physical meaning, thus it denoted the physical fitness; the moral meaning, i.e. the regular effort put into the development of intelligence and enhancement of the strong will; and the religious meaning, which indicated the obligation to worship gods. At present, the term "asceticism" has almost exclusively the moral and religious meaning, though it can be understood

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<sup>27</sup> The Portugal Episcopal Conference, *Sports in the service of the integral human development and the community of nations*, [in:] *Edukacja poprzez sport [Education through sports]*. Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 2004, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> See Z. Dziubiński, *Wiara – wychowanie - sport [Faith – education – sports]*, [in:] *Wiara a sport [Faith and sports]*. Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 1999, p. 248.

<sup>29</sup> See J. W. Gogol, *Asceza [Ascetism]*, [in:] *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej [Lexicon of the Catholic spirituality]*. M Chmielewski (ed.), Lublin - Cracow 2002, p. 63.

differently by a priest, monk or a layman. The form of asceticism will also change depending on the life circumstances and human vocation.<sup>30</sup>

Asceticism is a constant form of religious self-education and the strive for virtues, which does not exclude, at the same time, mortifying one's own body and resigning from pleasures. It is also about reducing various individual needs, embracing a moderate and harsh lifestyle on one's own free will in order to achieve perfection (Christianity, Islam, Brahmanism)<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, the religious asceticism is a voluntary, constant and systematic reducing needs, necessitated by life, to achieve perfection (e.g. in Christianity or yoga); while in its colloquial sense it refers to the renouncing and reducing the pleasures of life, and leading a moderate lifestyle.<sup>32</sup>

When analyzing asceticism in the context of Christianity, it should be emphasized that its essence consists in ensuring oneself of the communion with Christ, and not in achieving perfection in a given trait or virtue. Christians undertake the effort of fostering the sacrum sphere in themselves, as this is the place of the communion with Christ and His grace. The Christian notion of asceticism encompasses the entire human being and it is oriented towards the final aim, which is salvation.

In the Christian life, two major types of asceticism can be distinguished and they complement each other. The first one is the so-called *negative* or *defensive asceticism*, which is more oriented towards the soul and which focuses on overcoming

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<sup>30</sup> See M. Chmielewski, *Sto jeden pytań o życie duchowe [A hundred and one questions about the spiritual life]* (ed.), Lublin 1999, p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> See *Encyklopedia powszechna [Universal Encyclopedia]*. R. Łąkowski, vol. 1, Warsaw 1983, p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> See *Encyklopedia popularna [Universal Encyclopedia]*. B. Petrolin-Skowrońska, Warsaw 1992, p. 48.

the propensity for evil, as expressed in the St Ignatius' principle of *agere contra* (to act against temptations and evil propensities). The second type of asceticism is the *positive* or *offensive asceticism* and it consists in facing the difficulties and temptations, acting for the good of the neighbours, thus it can be demonstrated by attitude of service towards others<sup>33</sup>.

Asceticism can be also divided into active and passive. The active asceticism involves taking some specific, voluntary and self-restricting practices in order to achieve a given individual or social virtue (the service for the neighbours). The active asceticism is complemented by the passive asceticism, which is expressed by the full, child-like confidence in God's Providence, as well as accepting various restrictions resulting from the living conditions and making out of them the spiritual sacrifice, which could be submitted for different personal intentions or for the whole community of the believers.<sup>34</sup>

A Christian, in the area of asceticism, groups together various actions determined by faith and the aim of these actions is to take the control over oneself, as well as one's own drives and instincts, both corporal and intellectual, which amounts to the self-control and overcoming of egoism that manifest itself by focusing on "the self".<sup>35</sup> Taking sacrifices does not diminish in any way the Christian humanity, quite to the contrary – by resigning from some objects and matters, e.g. corporal pleasure, Christians gain benefits in a different, more significant sphere of their lives, as most often their personal dignity increases and they start to treat others as individuals. Thanks to

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<sup>33</sup> See M. Chmielewski, *Sto jeden pytań o życie duchowe [A hundred and one questions about the spiritual life]*, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Por. J. Szyran, *Asceza dla każdego [Asceticism for everyone]*, Teresin 2007, s.8.

asceticism, Christians are full of noble ideas. Thus, it is not important from what one resigns but in the name of what and whom this sacrifice is made.<sup>36</sup>

The contemporary asceticism is characterized by its optimistic approach to the world, which is evident in the self-improvement effort, which is possible through work, sport, fair distribution of goods or the active love of the neighbour. Asceticism enables to be “more human “, as it is completely voluntary, and in the metaphorical sense, it consists in following the Christ’s path and imitating Him, after having realized that none of the worldly goods is not able to satisfy human desires. Therefore, any of the Christian ascetic practices have become specific tools that serve to support the Christians in their sacramental life, faith and spiritual growth in Christ.<sup>37</sup>

While seeking the analogy between the sport and asceticism, it is worth reminding that sport does not only develop human body, but is also an important factor in the human personality, especially because it teaches respect for the human body, develops cognitive processes, facilitates obtaining knowledge and specific skills; through experience, training, persistence and cooperation, it also teaches how to be rational and how to think critically. Additionally, sport makes it easier to understand the laws of nature and the scope of human freedom and their how this is interrelated; it also develops intuition, reflection, imagination and responsibility. In a way, it is also the return to childhood, as it is an answer to our love of

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<sup>36</sup> See K. Jasińska, *Asceza a wychowanie [Asceticism and education]*, [in:] *Kościół a sport [Church and Sports]*. M. Barlak, Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 1995, p. 215.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*, 218-219.

fun and games, thus making it possible to experience the feeling of carelessness, joy and happiness.<sup>38</sup>

Sport is also a result of the psycho-intellectual activity of man: intuition, reflection, sense of responsibility for oneself and others; it also generates specific emotional and mental satisfaction, especially when achieving high results or when sport is associated with the long-awaited break from work or school, or is an opportunity to relax, relieve stress, and, at the same time, a counterproposal to alcohol, nicotine, drugs, participation in informal groups. This has a significant ethical and cultural dimension because, from this perspective, sport fulfils an educational role with regards to cognition, emotions, volition and personality, which can be subsumed as the personalistic and characterologic dimensions, which as a consequence, are the civilisational dimensions.<sup>39</sup>

If an individual strives for expanding the boundaries of freedom, this generates a lot of unnecessary aggression and envy, which is why “fight” has become an inherent part of the contemporary life and is often transferred to the field of sport. This has necessitated the need to promote good, eradicating evil and teach the proper behaviour. In order to preserve the beauty of the sport itself, the fair play rules need to be followed. Their author and fervent propagator was Baron Pierre de Coubertin, according to whom the “success is not the goal, but the means to achieve greater and greater goals. An

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<sup>38</sup> See Z. Łyko, *Elementy filozofii sportu w aspektach kulturowo-moralnych* [Elements of the sport philosophy in cultural and moral aspects], [in:] *Aksjologia Sportu* [Axiology of Sport]. Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 2001, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 41.

individual acquires values only to such a degree that they apply to the whole mankind<sup>40</sup>.

Looking at the way some of the sportsmen behave, it seems justifiable to evoke the rule of fair play and to highlight its particular importance, as it determines the spirit of sport. Without fair play, sport is no longer a sport, while competition turns into war. The idea of fair play takes its values from the great treasury of humanism, which according to Z. Krawczyk, is an order for the world as a whole and for a single human being, indicating how to realize the essence of homo genus.<sup>41</sup>

Asceticism is also related to sport from the perspective of nutritional hygiene, which consist in resignation from unhealthy food products, the addictive substances such as nicotine and alcohol, as well as proper management of leisure and sleep time, or sexual abstinence. It should be emphasized that the training schedules are indispensable in this case, as they make a sportsman's life a lot easier. Asceticism plays a similar role in human life, since it offers perfect training before achieving the established goals.<sup>42</sup>

It should be noted that, in order to achieve sainthood and develop specific virtues, God's grace is necessary. However, the grace itself does not solve our problems nor does it make people perfect without their involvement. The individual needs to get involved and respond to grace received from God.

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<sup>40</sup> *Pierre de Coubertin- Testament wielkiego humanisty* [*Testament of a great humanist*], [in:] *Kronika Sportu* [*Sport Chronicle*] M. B. Michalik, Warsaw 1993, p. 410.

<sup>41</sup> A. A. Dąbrowski, *Nagrody Fair Play w sporcie jako instrument edukacyjny* [*Fair play awards in sports as an educational tool*], [in:] *Chrześcijańska etyka sportu* [*Christian Sport Ethics*]. Z. Dziubiński, Warsaw 1993, p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> See *Asceza, Słownik grecko-polski* [*Ascetism, The Greek-Polish Dictionary*], vol.I. Z. Abramowiczówna (ed.), Warsaw 1958, p. 346.

Thanks to asceticism, which assumes that man received God's grace and responded to it, we can increase our chances for sainthood through the necessary spiritual training. The notion of the spiritual training is defined as the kind of Christian asceticism and it should not be confused with the concept of spiritual training spread by various types of sects and organizations such as New Age. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Christian spiritual training is not focused on detachment from the real world and resignation from the reality. On the contrary, it connects people with everyday life and makes them experience it more deeply.

To sum up, it should be emphasized that sport itself calls for reflection, it also shows some parallels with asceticism, since both sport and asceticism can significantly support a person practising the religion and searching for meaning of the spiritual life. Moreover, the sport itself may constitute a certain kind of asceticism, and both of these factors perfectly complements the spiritual life, as they are related to the extremely significant areas of human life – corporality and spirituality. Church has never distanced itself from the religious practices but even recommended them as excellent building blocks of the spiritual life. It referred to sport in a similar way, by underlining its beauty and educational values. The humanism of the Catholic Church follows, with huge interest and kindness, the good and nobility associated with sport, while discarding at the same time those factors, which have detrimental effects on people connected with sport and which contribute to the view of sport as the arena of unhealthy competition. Church is present in the reality of sport due to the National Chaplaincy of Athletes, which proves to be valuable challenge in the context of a new evangelization.

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