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**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PERSONALISTIC
CONCEPT OF EDUCATION ACCORDING TO
VASILY V. ZENKOVSKY (1881-1962)**

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SUMMARY

Vasily Vasilyevich Zenkovsky (1881–1962) is one of the most prominent Russian educators of the first half of the 20th century. His achievements, which include several books and articles on pedagogical issues, should be acknowledged as significant. His numerous reflections on the theory and practice of education associated with children and youth can be found in his publications about theology, culturology and philosophy, but above all in the field of psychology as Zenkovsky began his academic career as a psychologist. His memoirs serve as an abundant source of knowledge on his pedagogical views, particularly from the period of his activity in the youth student movement during his years in emigration, which is from 1920 to 1952.

Despite his rich academic achievements, the figure and views of Vasily Zenkovsky as a pedagogue are not widely known even among educational specialists and researchers. He is certainly better known as a theologian, historian of philosophy and a psychologist. His two monumental works – *History of Russian Philosophy* and *Foundations of Christian Philosophy* – belong to the canon of mandatory reading for anyone researching Russian philosophical thought and religious philosophy. In Poland, Zenkovsky's views most often can be found in sections dedicated to religious philosophy in dictionaries of philosophy, textbooks and studies conducted in the field of Russian philosophy. Zenkovsky is also known to historians of psychological thought. His book entitled *The Psychology of Childhood* translated by Piotr Macewicz was published in Lviv in 1929. Unfortunately, this is the only work produced by Zenkovsky which has been translated into Polish to date.

As a result, there is a serious lack in Polish academic literature of research into the intellectual legacy of this exceptional figure. The topic of this dissertation is his **personalistic concept of education** and in particular its **reconstruction**, because Zenkovsky never compiled his pedagogical views into one coherent system and even

opposed such an idea. The fact remains that he is acknowledged as the creator of an original pedagogical concept, which emphasises personalistic education from the perspective of the Orthodox Christian anthropology.

The main objective of this academic doctoral dissertation is identical to its title: **The Reconstruction of the Personalistic Concept of Education According to Vasily V. Zenkovsky (1881-1962)**. Achieving the main objective of this academic dissertation entails realizing the following goals:

- describing and analysing the creative achievements of Vasily Zenkovsky in the scope of pedagogical studies;
- describing and analysing the creative achievements of Vasily Zenkovsky in the fields of psychology, theology, philosophy and culturology, paying special attention to the pedagogical issues included;
- characterizing and analysing the meaning of the psychological and pedagogical ideas and movements at end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century in the development of Zenkovsky's pedagogical concept;
- defining the methodological foundations of Zenkovsky's pedagogical concept;
- describing and explaining the main notions of the pedagogical personalism according to Vasily Zenkovsky;
- analysing the causes of Zenkovsky's critical attitude towards naturalistic education and its characteristic anthropology;
- analysing the issues related to the development of a child's moral consciousness in the light of Zenkovsky's pedagogical personalism.

The main research problem has been defined in the question: to what extent does the Vasily Zenkovsky's personalistic educational concept conform to Russian philosophical-pedagogical concepts of the 19th century and where should we seek its originality in terms of human education?

Detailed questions are expressed by the following:

- How does Vasily Zenkovsky's concept of personalism stem from his life experiences and to what extent is it determined by his theological outlooks?
- What indicators of his educational concept might be considered crucial to the original Vasily Zenkovsky's conceptualization of personalism?

The pedagogical concept created by Vasily Zenkovsky undoubtedly belongs to the most significant accomplishments of Russian pedagogical thought of the first half of the 20th century. It is interdisciplinary by its nature. Its foundation are: Orthodox Christian anthropology, the concept of human freedom as a gift of God and the axiology closely connected with them. Focusing on raising children to become persons and to experience freedom properly, and then raising them to truth and goodness, are the fundamental mainstays of the personalistic pedagogical concept of Vasily Zenkovsky. Furthermore, what draws attention to his concept is the manner of connecting questions of pedagogy and psychology and the methodology applied. In his reflections on the topic of attributes of a “child’s soul”, his inclinations to psychology and experimental pedagogy, which are the roots of his academic interests, are evident. Zenkovsky was never convinced by the “new education” pedagogy, also known in Russia, which was popular at the turn of the 20th century. He also maintained distance to idealism and naturalism in pedagogy. He can, however, be described as a representative of Christian pedagogical realism.

The essence of personalistic education according to Vasily Zenkovsky is embedding the objectives of pedagogical influence in the concept of humans understood as created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1: 26) and their call to develop “the gift of freedom” while achieving the final goal of divinization (gr. *theosis*). Zenkovsky’s personalistic pedagogy is therefore an example of academic reflection on the reality of education (in both theory and practice), whilst taking into consideration the teachings of Holy Scripture and the theological tradition of the Orthodox Church. The pedagogy he elaborated draws its specificity and uniqueness from the philosophical, theological and religious worldviews characteristic for Orthodoxy. It therefore is found in the paradigm of Christian pedagogy which, while finding itself under the influence of and in a spiritual climate of faith, acknowledges the Revelation and Tradition of the Church as a so called “negative criterion”, that is subjecting the concepts elaborated by pedagogues to criticism, particularly in questions of anthropological and axiological beliefs.

According to Vasily Zenkovsky, pedagogical reflection on education is based on two main foundations:

- Orthodox Christian anthropology of the “image and likeness of God”, where the truth about man as a person is hidden;
- the concept of the freedom of the human person as a “gift of God”.

According to Zenkovsky, within the concept of “person” in the meaning of *hypostasis* and *prosopon*, as given by Orthodox Christian anthropology, the truth of his relationality is hidden. Relationality and dialogicality reveal the essential dimension of being a person by being oriented “towards” others, which is the condition of building societal ties. By understanding man as a person, and not only as an individual, which is characteristic of reductionist anthropologies, Zenkovsky emphasises freedom and dignity of the human person, the categories that are essential to comprehending his concept of the process of education. In his opinion, freedom cannot be limited only to the ability to choose and realise one’s plans, but is also a description of a person from the inside, as well as their creative power and drive to act. Freedom is therefore a principle of the human spirit, an essential condition to perceive, a creative power and foundation of authentic interpersonal relations. For this reason, Zenkovsky states, raising children to experience freedom and to develop the gift of freedom is necessary. Achieving this task, in association with formation to become a person, is the most important objective of pedagogy.

The third determinant of personalistic pedagogy according to Zenkovsky, closely associated with raising children to become persons and to properly experience freedom, is moral formation. Awakening and shaping values, which are its main goals, take place above all by raising children to become people and to properly experience freedom. According to Vasily Zenkovsky, an authentic self-understanding as a person (*hypostasis* and *prosopon*) and experiencing authentic freedom, opens us to God and others. In this way, the sphere of relations comes into existence, in which moral formation is realized. Working on the moral formation should therefore take place in early childhood. In order to accomplish this goal, basic knowledge of the specificity of the development of a child’s moral consciousness is necessary.

In the author’s conviction, the personalistic concept of education according to Vasily Zenkovsky deserves attention not only because it is not well known in Poland. Its asset is also the fact that it is based on empirical knowledge from the fields of psychology and pedagogy. Above all, it is based on Zenkovsky’s rich pedagogical experience, which was not obtained in a quiet office or laboratory, but while providing practical assistance to children and working with youth. The author believes that this brilliant Russian pedagogue’s concept of education can prove to be highly inspirational in the context of designing particular strategies of pedagogical impact, both in theory and in practice. The fact that this work corresponds to the academic and research interests of the author, which are concentrated on preschool and early school education is also significant.