Religious Education – Paradigm for Contemporary Education

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ABSTRACT

The current context of youth education promotes a model based solely on the transmission of information. One insists on the quantity and universality of the subjects and loses sight of the value of knowledge for life. Before this bareness of value and emotion, youth religious education has maintained since ancient times a catechetical model that integrates information with lifestyle. The initiated one is not conditional upon the information, according to the contemporary model, but the information contributes with other elements to the formation of personality in order to cultivate its characteristic dimensions

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INTRODUCTION. EDUCATION BASED EXCLUSIVELY ON INFORMATION

In order to understand the current educational system, a return in time bringing the principles that guided this process is useful. Thus, the first landmark is found during the Enlightenment, when rationalism prevails before any human quality. The so-called formation of the human man was supported by Locke [1] or Rousseau [2]. They claimed that people are born equal from a cognitive point of view and that there are only small differences due to their nature. All depends on education and the society has the power to influence people's training. The Enlighteners' project was to build a society based on equality, guaranteed by reason. Their manifesto was structured around education for everyone, but only starting from everybody's common reason.

The literary movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries proposed a massive training of humanity. However, both the Enlightenment and the Humanism represented a secular and anticlerical movement which proposed abandoning all religious-type teachings. In Romania, the Transylvanian School supported the emancipation of people through culture and education. Gheorghe Şincai, director of the schools, established 300 schools that would benefit from the first printed textbooks or popularizing books [3]. The universality of education and the right to information represent a progress, but they are the moment in which a double rupture occurs: from an anthropological point of view, man is divided between mind and body, and from a theological point of view, man is deprived of a complete vision of the world, contrary to the logical and scientific explanations proposed. It should be noted that, as per the Enlighteners' vision, virtue as a goal of education did not mean following a model or achieving religious values. Reason is at the center of education, I can say automatic and independent, which excluded a full vision of achieving man as personality.

The industrialized society of the twentieth century brings new elements to the education. On the one hand, the Enlightenment project is continued and developed. Education in traditional terms of searching for virtues and happiness is replaced by an education of the mind. Thus, the natural evolutionary phases of the child in order to

propose adequate methods are researched. Pedagogy becomes thus more didactic. Along scientific psychology, the cognitive science brought an important contribution which proposed an intelligent and mechanical man. On the other hand, industrialization and robotization do not require educated people. More than specialists, people must be educated in order to constantly adapt to the context.

Dewey's modern democratic model is built around the concept of experience that becomes an instrument of adaptation to a global vision man – nature – society [4]. Man acts constantly and adapts to environmental requirements; in this vision, thinking is considered an instrument of action: it must find solutions when encountering obstacles. In my opinion, even if man regains his pragmatic and real dimension, in reality a new division is produced: education is externalized, meaning that one no longer seeks the subjective definition of personality, but solutions imposed by external conditions are sought. Pedagogy of young people is in fact a permanent formation for permanent reconstruction and reorganization of living conditions. Young people are invited to seek better solutions to common problems, without receiving criteria of values. Competitiveness in a globalized world requires knowing a significant amount of information and ability to reorganize it in order to remove a fault.

The last element that I mention in this introduction and that supports computerized contemporary education is the computer. This mechanism appeared relatively recently in human evolution is an element that plays an important role in everyday life of man. I would say, and certainly the majority states it, that education will be organized in the future around computer: evaluation, interaction and skills. On the one hand, this tool offers multiple possibilities, both by a varied value level and by the access to information. However, its use involves high risks: elimination of ethical and aesthetic judgments, the lack of a quality and truth criterion of the information, social isolation. The current situation, when most people have instant access to technologized information, is unprecedented and education seems to limit to its use. Computer brings benefits to education, but also high risks.

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS-TYPE HOLISTIC EDUCATION

The Christian philosophy is hereditary to the Greek culture and retains certain elements: the manner to pose problems, the language or concepts. Educating young people at the ancient Greeks, also called Paideia, meant creating a virtuous person, fully developed. Not only knowledge of information is important – individuals were trained to be brave, righteous, strong, loyal and very harmoniously physically developed [5]. A good education was manifested in both bodily and spiritual beauty. One may speak about a state of excellence in all areas that Christianity will propose in its education. Saint John Chrysostom speaks in On vainglory and the right way for parents to bring up their children about education as a fundamental human process: "to educate means to care for children and young people in terms of soul cleanliness and decency, to bring up the child according to moral principles, a righteous and pious man, to model his intelligence, in a word to care for the salvation of his soul" [6].

Marcus Plested offers a series of arguments in favor of the holistic-type education of the first Christian centuries [7]. Education allows an individual to be what he is. Therefore, the freedom that every man to transform himself, to be wiser by improving soul and body is a prerequisite. The man receiving religious education did nothing but practice and develop his own potential. Professor Plested suggests a return to the sources, to this treasure of Christian teachings of the patristic age.

Education in different Christian denominations developed differently and the West turned to an oral transmission of the teachings. The Christian East has placed since the beginning the education on the church liturgical dimension. Father Alexander Schmemann is the one who insisted that the liturgical cycles represent education by their nature. Moreover, catecheses were traditionally education methods in the religious services [9]. What Christian education seeks in the Orthodox is "to bring the individual into the life" [9]; the formative system is not limited to the transmission of dogmatic or moral teachings, but it seeks to create the participants. By the liturgical experience, those present are part of the Body of Christ. The Christian catechesis emphasizes exactly this participation before any logical explanation or understanding. For this reason, the educational program seems to be missing or to be confused with the ritual program in Orthodoxy [10].

Author Constance Tarasar has studied the topic of education in the Orthodox space since the '60s. Continuing the work of Schmemann, she supports the priority of education through experience since an early age: "The child learns to worship through experience from the very first moments in the Church. The child's first 'understandings' come through the senses" [11]. In another study, Tarasar analyzes the principle of restoring the connection between theology and liturgical experience in the context of catechesis as a form of life of the church [12].

The analysis is on the line of an ecological education in which not only the mind but also the body seem to contain more quickly and more deeply some religious realities. I would like to mention here that the history of education tried a new paradigm in the past decades. The vision of the Italian educator Montessori is revolutionary, who realizes that education is wrong when it puts an equality of mind between the adult educator and student. According to her, education is a self-learning through experience, an achievement of Ego through the tools provided by the educator. Education is free and harmonic and implies experimented knowledge, and the child's mind absorbs information from the environment in order to embody them [13]. With some obvious differences, we can say that the educational system seems to return to a model that has worked for two millennia in the Orthodox Church.

In the Christian West, Augustine was the one who succeeded for the first time to connect the ancient Greek and Roman philosophy with the Christian teaching [14]. In his main work on education – De Magistro, two ways are proposed: the one of dialectics based on concepts and that of direct experience that leads to the truth. Of Neoplatonic origin, Augustine realizes that the informative-type education has a limit, remains in the universe of words and signs. Knowing the truth is an experience lived by his own interiority. In fact, the Western author proposes a model found in the entire Christianity: religion is a mystery/secret and the circulated truth is superior to the understanding capacity of the human mind. Religious education is a revelation in which man, through faith, accepts unconditionally. The formula found by Augustine is Crede ut intelligas, intellige ut credas, which translates into Faith helps intelligence, and intelligence must be put at the service of faith.

FOLLOWING A MODEL

In Christianity, body and spirit education is not limited to the assimilation of theological information, but it is achieved by following a model. The Apostles were the first to receive the Christian religious education and the Saints followed the same model: Jesus Christ. The religious teaching is not one to inform, but it is one of association and identification with the master. It is neither hypothetical nor self-defining; it has a real

purpose in its model. According to the Greek model, the purpose of religious education is not knowledge of the historical or dogmatic realities, but the total transformation of man. The Theological Pedagogy of the Fathers confirms that education consists in the ennoblement of the life up to fullness of assimilation to God [15].

I can say that the Christian model of education in school, family or church institutions is more or less one of discipleship. A person who wants a religious training gets into a relationship with a master who asks him to undergo a series of stages to reach the level of the master. Unlike school based solely on information, discipleship provides accompanying the master. Things do not seem forced when we consider the education of young pupils: on the one hand, teachers are mostly priests or have theological training, which indicates that there are more than teachers; on the other hand, religion classes at school are only part of the religious education. Often, and especially in rural areas, young people find the religion teacher in church, where he participate in the liturgical and community life of the parish.

The advantage of following a master-model is that the disciple, knowing him more than what he says, succeeds through these contacts to acquire a whole vision on the world. The master's qualities are fundamental in this system; he must embody an intellectual and also ethical authority. Those who listen to him expect from him not only to convey them the teachings of faith, but also to be their embodiment.

The connection between priesthood and education is very close. The priest is an educator not only in the school department, but throughout the entire liturgical and pastoral mission he undertakes. The fact that not science makes him an educator is significant, but the ability to convey what he knows through a certain refinement or even his own way of life: "The priest ... is especially an educator. His life is a lesson. His sermon is a lesson. Confession is a lesson. In all there is a lot of pedagogy, and in confession, he himself is as if before judgment, when he listens to the one presenting his facts at the judgment. The judge must know the value of everything that is confessed. He needs unequivocal, precise and clear criteria. Being an educator – it was said – is real art. But it was also said that it is also science. Art gives the priest the mobility, method, adaptation to the psychology and character of the previous speaker, gracefulness and kindness, but science, which means the priest's culture, gives solutions. Without the former, it is not possible, without the second, the first remains meaningless and without content" [16].

CONCLUSIONS

Saint John Chrysostom compares education with an art, and the child's soul with wax, pearl, statue or painting. As soft wax can be easily modeled, so can the child's soul be easily formed from an early age [20]. Therefore, education in Orthodoxy, along with the firmness of the subject, contains different ways to become a Christian. This flexibility, resulting from the holistic manner of education, differentiates the East from the Christian West. Studying the history of the Church, Boojamra notes that religious education was more formal than informal [21]. The ultimate goal is not the acquisition of information and adaptive capacities, but creating a person complying with the Christological model. Metanoia or paideia of the person is different from simply informing the individual, as proposed by the modern education [22]. It is the opposite of today's pedagogical context abusing the amount of information.

Another conclusion results that deserves a future study. No person can be educated outside a community; either it is a family, a school, a monastery or a parish. To be trained, a

person patiently follows a journey in the company of a master. To get into a process of religious education means both membership and participation in the community life.

However, the bodily dimension of education in Orthodoxy brings also some gaps. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research of the argument and its rare systematization. The need for a greater awareness of the pedagogical act is highlighted by Kallistos Ware, by the fact that any living tradition is not a mechanical repetition, but a work with which culture and nature associate [23].

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