

Religious education for the young: a stability factor in the contemporary society

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the principal activities supposing in a general manner the process of care for the good training of man. But Christian religious education is actually a meeting of man with Jesus Christ, the supreme Teacher, which is why it has a special character going beyond the rigid scholastic framework and involving the space of the Church. Family, School, Church and society are the main factors, but also along with the environment, where the education and training process of the young begin. Sure, what must be noted is the fact that religious education is a continual process by means of which man covers the road from person to personality, from imperfection to holiness.

Keywords: religious education; Christ; family, school; man;

Introduction

Religious education is a complex action involving communication as a first stage of the communion, of the connection with God and our fellows. Religious education has a supra-natural imperative going beyond the possibilities of conceptual expression, aiming to lift each human to the state of perfection, of holiness, which involves the space of the Church. According to the Christian teaching, education is accomplished by Christ, He is the Great Pedagogue Who by the Church and the Holy Mysteries lives by grace in the Christians' being, which is why Christian education makes permanent what is noble in our soul, namely Christ the Man-God, making us bearers of God. By education, two great aims are pursued: the first is for the young to receive the general knowledge he will need during his life, and the other is to prepare today's child to become the man of tomorrow, and the crowning of the two takes place when man has the power to obtain that autonomy determining him to reach stability in life, which reveals him as a managerial personality permanently turned to learning and lifelong education.

Etymologically, the word *education* comes from the Latin "*educō, -āre*", a process meaning to take care, to nurture, to lead man, using adequate methods, towards a target meant to give him personality. Education appeared along with man, being fundamental for him, because only by it the human person becomes a personality, accomplishes himself.

Education is a priority that generally involves the process of care in relation to the proper training of man in accordance with the ecclesial rules. Family, School, Church and society are the main factors, but also the environment in which the process of training and education of the young starts. Each of these channels present risks and advantages, generating positive outcomes or failures. A transparent and objective analysis of these results could potentially lead to an effective model of education for young people. Of course, it should be noted that religious education is a continuous process in which man travels on the road from person to personality, to morality and civic and social spirit. In the

vision of Thomas Groome, Christian education is a political activity with pilgrims in time that deliberately and intentionally attends with them to the activity of God in our present, to the Story of the Christian faith community, and to the Vision of God's Kingdom, the seeds of which are already among us [1].

What is the role of Christian religious education in aiding young people to become good people? Our young people are losing their way and falling victim to drugs, violence, prison, and have poor education. The absence of holistic view in education is evident and any serious attempt to overcome such problem has to pay effective attention to religion. Christian religious education is defined as the process where by Christian learning takes place [2]. Unfortunately, today the norms and methodologies of modern psycho-pedagogy place the accent on the humanistic side of education, which generated a relativization of the young's moral life, but also the apparent liberty and the hedonistic and permissive way of life, yet devoid of values. For example, we shall bring into discussion what is proposed today on a global level, namely civic education, sexual education, environmental education, good in themselves, yet which do not offer the young orientation and counseling for the shaping of a good moral character, but institutionalize, professionalize them (because they are intelligent, good IT specialists, good researchers, etc.), yet dehumanized, with no respect to life and dignity (let us think of sexuality, abortion, homosexuality, suicides – the EMO generation, euthanasia, the living together of same-sex people) or more simply let us behold the “look” of a young man full of hideous and morbid tattoos degrading the beauty of the human nature, of the divine image that involves the body as well, created to be temple of the Holy Spirit.

1. Education of the young in a moral religious spirit, basis for the future society

Religion is the free, aware, vivid and personal connection between man and God. The existence of religion is interdependent with the issue of Human existence and the issue of knowledge under all its aspects. The education of the young in a religious spirit is a fundamental problem of enrichment and spiritual continuity both as a nation and especially as a church. A society prevails and resists in history by the force of the faith it practices: in this sense His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania, says: *“Religion is an essential and defining part of the European culture. Without the knowledge offered by it we cannot understand the history and culture of this continent and we cannot treasure the cathedrals, monasteries, churches, visual and musical works of art, most of them inspired by religious faith. It is not right to wipe away, in the name of laity, whole centuries of history and culture inspired by the religious faith. One cannot mutilate the soul of Europe ignoring the masterpieces in architecture, painting, sculpture, literature or music, to support a pretended emancipation based on the spiritual void of secularization. We can never replace the constant values of religion with the ephemeral models of a self-sufficient and anti-religious humanism”* [3].

The young are willing to know, run after the information provided easily by the internet, the media, but they often start from agnostic, materialist conceptual principles, promoted by science, having the conviction that the truth is relative and the Christian virtues are impossible to accomplish and useless. Sure, the need and the necessity of the young to have models to follow, in the Christian world is supported by the reality of faith, which, practiced, becomes truly the fundamental axis of existence, and in this sense the examples are innumerable starting with Christ and the whole community of Saints that followed Him. While in the first stages of life, God is perceived in an anthropomorphic

sense (as an older parent), gradually the perception and relation to the divinity will be accessed via the religious knowledge received in the family, in school and in the Church. The result of this triple collaboration is the shaping of a healthy moral character, the young, the adolescent is not just put face to face with reality, with the truth, with the transcendental reality (God), but at the same time on the personal level feels a predisposition for the perennial, profound values by means of which life becomes authentic, activating or bringing back to life the indefinite personal value received by grace from the good Creator, via the divine image. *“Religious education assumes a constant oscillation and guidance of instructional - formative approaches between reason and feeling, aimed at producing concurrent changes in the cognitive (knowledge and assumption of values, principles and religious norms), affective-motivational (favouring the manifestation of religious belief and motivational support required to comply with the norms) and behavioural level (acquiring skills specific to religious behaviour). What we consider to be noteworthy is the emergence of the feeling of satisfaction that the duty fulfilled consciousness offers, a feeling that can sometimes take the form of an emotional state of true happiness. The shades are customized, with each person knowing the feeling of fulfilled consciousness to a greater or lesser extent, according to their own experiences and experiential contexts” [4].*

Adolescence, the age at which perennial truths take shape, is a period full of transformations on the social, physical and psychic level. Related to this aspect, nowadays we are witnessing eccentric preoccupations among the young, in their way of living, regarding the adaptation to the tendencies clothing, and fun in fashion, and also a lack of interest regarding the spiritual life, regarding the Church.

Outgoing, yet sensitive, the young live sudden passages from states of happiness to states of discouragement or depression, from the feeling of power to that of doubt, of decrease of their self-esteem. To face these emotions, the adolescents develop reactions of aggressiveness and opposition to all that means authority (parent, teachers, and institutions)[5].

The psychologists define these states relating them to the following aspects [6]:

1. Search of self-identity, search of a personal set of values,
2. Acquisition of the necessary skills for a good social interaction,
3. Gaining emotional independence in relation to one's parents, need of attitudes and activities.

But certainly finding the real meaning of life has to do with the revelation made by God and transmitted by Church. Unfortunately, many young people do not hear the voice of the Church. For this reason, the Church needs to get closer to them and find connection and communication bridges [7].

The Church's pastoral missionary character is directly related to the manifestation in the world, developed in time and space from Pentecost until the end of time, that entrench the threefold ministry of Christ for man and society each time. The church has a special educational influence, due primarily to the presence of our Master Jesus Christ and His eternal teaching. Church proposes a goal and a high ideal, namely perfection, and offers both a model to be followed by Saviour Jesus Christ. *“The Church has the task of educating all humanity to make it worthy of the supernatural life” [8].* The Christian spiritual life involves material existence, but it doesn't rest enclosed between its boundaries, which is why moral-religious education of the youth aims at the just implementation of the spirituality in the daily life. This process starts within the familial environment, but it has to be extended and socially involved in the ecclesial sacramental frame.

In the name of the scientific light, we must stress the epistemological importance of inter and trans-disciplinary character of knowledge, facilitated by the religious education. Knowing God revealed through word, the man knows himself and discovers what is his meaning in the world, namely to praise HIM, the Creator, through Christ, and to live permanently in word and deed the just and Holy teaching (Matthew 5,17). Jesus Christ, our Savior, has embraced with love and compassion all the needs and sorrows of the world alienated from God and but highlighted the divine revelation in his activity which was put into the service of human salvation seized from sin and death. *“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 centre of education, I can say automatic and independent, which excluded a full vision of achieving man as personality” [9].*

By entering into this mission of serving human, religious education is first of all a factor of knowledge and training of a good moral character. Education in general and religious education in particular has a supernatural imperative beyond the possibilities of conceptual expression that aimed at restoring and raising of each individual being created by God but fell into sin, the better condition and why not, to perfection. In the Christian religious plan, this is accomplished by Christ Himself, who is the “Great Teacher” who lives sacramentally in our being, since Baptism, which is why Christian education bring what is noble in our soul: the Christ, God - Man, which gives meaning and light of life. The life in Christ and the right faith support and animate the knowledge of God, as work and fruit of love (Gal. 5,6) because the God desires all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2, 14).

2. The role of Family in the formation of the young’s personality

The family has always represented not only a complex system of socio-affective life based on feelings of love that generated interpersonal relationship, but exerted a major influence on the development of man and society.

As a social form the family is the basic unit of any type of company. In the context of every society, human families played a stabilizing role, but due to continuing social, mentality and status changes, the issue of the family remained a reality with a dynamic size and content, continuously engaged in the complexity of human existence in the world.

In a brief comparative analysis, of the Christian thought and the humanist logic, it becomes obvious that the organization of the human species had the family foundation as the core of society; but at its foundation, the humanistic thinking always places the association of two free beings to live together, while a Christendom founded by Holy Sacrament of Matrimony [10].

In Christianity the family is not just a social form, a social group, but more than that it is a reality where God's love is active. The Education is necessary in the family because here is born, establishing the temporarily future, a future for which the Christian family is accountable to the people and to God. *“Christian family has a significant role in the education of the religious-moral character. Education is necessary even since [the child is in] the bosom of the family, because it is there that the temporary future begins and is*

founded - a future for which the Christian family is responsible to people and to God. The Christian family is meant to introduce the child in the religion he belongs to by baptism but also by the shaping of the first behaviours. The first religious notions are received by the child in the family, because parents ought to teach their children God's word, yet they ought to be models especially by their actions, their life and their virtues: charity, kindness, forgiveness, piety to the saints and to the Holy Mysteries of the Church. The relations between parents and children suppose a special mechanism, filtered socially; these relations rely on the norms related to communication, by which a behavioral pattern is realized" [11].

The family is the institution most put into the service of life; it is the first school of personality formation, but also the deepest reality of love. Therefore, the morality in the family life has decisive influence in the process of education and youth formation. The education process always takes place on the background and concomitant with various moral influences exerted on human and therefore on child. In the structure of pedagogical rules, the modern educational reality of the family is linked to knowledge of rights, freedoms and rights of children, and age of the individual features, strategies and educational technologies, methods of training and cultivation of moral and spiritual values. *"The Education is the only human activity that may oppose negative principles of human life. The education responds principles totality, a fullness, universality and perennial" [12].* The family is the first institution of moral education; it is by excellence the medium of childhood education.

The man as an individual and social being was, is and will be sensitive to appreciation of people in the of facts and behaviour. The child's education which begins in family is really focused on building an adequate behaviour in accordance with moral norms and rules that it humanizes because, as I mentioned, morality is a social phenomenon which reflects the established relationships between people. As time went the child's moral skills develop on the parents and peers' behavioural patterns, which influence the formation of feelings and moral skills (the moral concepts and judgments), which later externalize in the child's behaviours and deeds, by sheer will, being previously processed at the level of consciousness and transformed into knowledge and moral beliefs.

The moral climate of the family depends on the morality of the society which interacts with the family. The family relationships are built and developed in two directions: vertically – inter generational relationships (parents-children, grandparents-grandchildren etc.) and intra-generational horizontal – relations between members of the same generation (between spouses, siblings, grandparents, etc.). These relationships complement each other and influence the formation of human behaviour. Therefore, family education includes a whole variety of complex adult actions of caring, upbringing and educating children, oriented towards their cultivation and social integration, focusing on the formation of a civilized behaviour, but also on religious formation. This set of actions with regulatory functions, is involved in achieving education, namely the methods and strategies of education.

Unfortunately the educational policies applied in the family are more stiff and formal than existential and moral in the rich states, and almost totally lacking in poor countries. Let us think about the concrete situation of poverty in which education is not a priority, only religious education is performed, but if that is not revealed, it has no real spiritual purposes, but is transformed into fanaticism and extremism that strikes increasingly more in our world through terrorist attacks, acts of vandalism in the name of

faith. Does mankind use this education? Of course not! Let us consider in this context the families who sell their children. Does this education serve humanity? Of course not! Let's think about the high degree of human trafficking, where most children are corrupts because of lack of education.

At the opposite have modern States with educational systems and rigid civil law, but that is not in the service of normality. To think about the acceptance of coexistence between people of the same sex, who in the abnormality in which they live have the opportunity to adopt children? Does the model of family education received by these poor children is the best? Does this education serve humanity? Of course not! What do the habilitated institutions do for education? Of course statistics, in which man is like an object placed from side to side. What will be the outcome of these exacerbated abnormalities? Definitely dehumanizing nihilism, consumerism that in their finality kills man slowly but surely, at particular by anxiety, alienation and maladjustment etc., and overall creates economic crisis of identity and orientation after which mankind is focused towards material goods and not the human person. On this basis it is actually a strong moral issue. The Christianity and especially the Orthodox Christianity is centred to service of man who acquires the education and training which is necessary for moral life both in the world and especially for the eternal life for which man is preparing on earth.

3. The role of Christianity in forming religious culture and moral personality of youth

The education and training of young start within the family and continues with the action carried out by the school in close collaboration with the Church, which crystallizes moral and civic and moral-religious education.

The mission of the Church aims to rebuild the world and involves communicating an everlasting message – the Gospel, the word of Christ for the world which transforms the man and times, because it frames by grace all which is human and relative in the axiomatic area. The Evangelic word contradicts the cultural requirements manifested in a particular historical stage of ideologies, mind sets or civilizations, weighing eminently humanistic their proving that the true culture is linked to God through the Holy Spirit, even if the time is persecuted by “masters of this world”: “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5.1).

The culture is related to worship, it develops from religious cult. Every religion has an influence on culture as it develops and manifests itself through its faithful intercession both the vertical relationship with God and horizontally with others. As we can see, Christianity was and is a factor of social and cultural perpetuation and continuity because “*Christianity is the religion par excellence and cultural religion par excellence*” [13]. The philosophical thought, scientific knowledge, architecture, painting, sculpture, music, poetry, morality - all is organically included in the religious cult, but in a still vague, undifferentiated form. For example, the oldest culture, the Egyptian culture, began in the temple and its first creators were even priests. Culture is linked to ancestor worship, legend and tradition, it is full of symbolic sacred, in it there are given signs of spiritual reality. Any culture, even material culture, is culture of the spirit. Every culture is based on a spiritual culture, it is “*the product of the creative work of the spirit over natural spectres*” [14].

The church has a special cultural and pedagogical influence, in the first aspect she inserted the man, limited by time and space in the supernatural life through participation in divine transcendence. Christianity proposes and gives man a purpose and a high ideal of perfecting whose foundation is the Saviour Jesus Christ. “*If our religion would not be built*

on some truths about God, truth which, as such, are clear and can be known with certainty, we would not escape the confusion that reigns today in the ideal education on human nature. We must trust in Magisterium of Church, which invites us to possess the truth which gives us a foothold in life and allows us to escape the total obscurity which surrounds our ultimate destiny” [15].

Christian religious feeling is a source of energy and moral power as the model of perfection: God-Man Jesus Christ through the Church is contemporary educator transmitting the disciples (students, all men) true norms that sustain life. Compared to the other religious systems, which cancel, restrict and limit human freedom, in the Orthodox Christian thought, man freely chooses to follow the rules of the divine through by his own will and not by constraint, convinced that God is creator of the world, the ultimate truth. In this spirit the school communicates to the student the Orthodox faith about God and his moral law, but *“the student is not compelled to accept, he will decide whether to accept, at the end of the educational act, the teaching about faith in God and his moral law; only he will decide whether to live and behave morally-religiously or irreligious” [16].*

It is true that there may be an ethical education, civic in the elitist humanistic spirit and thinking. But the difference between the two meanings of education (religious or humanist) is that humanistic ethics relates to the general experience of life of the people and their individual experience and moral religiousness relates to God-Man Jesus Christ the Saviour. Moral and civic education supports the initiation of man as a future citizen, in practicing an active behaviour, capable of tolerance and responsible towards themselves and towards others, aware of their rights and duties they have towards society. The Christian religious education is only possible if Christ himself is received in the soul and that this soul works together with Christ, to perfection, and that is really a path to perfection.

The importance and mission of Christianity in forming moral character is essential, and is done both in the institutional framework provided by the school educational systems in different countries and in the service of public worship offered by the Church. Celebration of faith is manifested in fidelity to the heritage offered by the Christian life and to the Church. The mission of Church militates for fully campaigning for a Christianity that interferes with the social and spiritual dimension. According to the teachings of the Church *“Christian life has meaning and value to the extent that it is a perpetual concern for their salvation” [17].*

Broadly religious education from a Christian perspective is part of efforts to salvation which involves space ecclesial: religious services, the activity of priests, church music, paintings, sculptures, architectural design that not only deepens feelings of respect and piety, but wake up and support the feelings, moral and aesthetic interests and behaviours of those who step into this spiritual perimeter. This entails cooperation between school and church. The school is a living institution which organizes learning experiences, which aims to achieve objectives using scientific methods and means.

The school informs students and forms under certain principles, taking care to assess how skills or educational objectives have been achieved. School is a contributing factor of Christian education; it must compensate and fill the gaps, the weaknesses of the religious and moral education acquired in the family. Families and schools have constant need of spiritual assistance of the Church; its presence is felt in all circumstances of life. Christian norms and values promoted by religious education are meant to create in young feelings of unity, to unite them freely, as opposed to thought individualization and secularization and to contemporary life. Christian education is based on the personal capacity of openness and

acceptance through love of neighbour, understanding life as a continuous ebb and flow of love of justice revealed in altruism, embodied in Christian charity. Through this entire process the young on the path of gaining the moral religious personality, deeply involved in the social area [18].

Christian Education does not involve any fanaticism, it has Jesus Christ as model, who by His teaching has united the world divided and dehumanized with harmony of divine perfection. Christian teaching effectiveness is maximized only when it is lived in everyday life as Christ the Saviour does: *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matt. 11, 29; John 13, 5). This living example of Christ recommends St. Apostle Paul, who following in his turn Christ tries to persuade: *“Therefore I urge you to imitate me”* (I Cor. 4:16), or in another part tells the disciple Timothy: *“And so you became a model to all the believers”* (I Thess. 1,7). Jesus Christ lived in his teaching, He did not theorized, He did not created a science about of God, but as the Son of Heavenly Father He made us children of the same Father: *“The Saviour’s activity of catechism, His teaching work is not template, but resilient, given the apperceptive body, i.e. age, culture degree, profession and concerns of His hearers. Therefore, Jesus talks about seed ploughmen, about drills, vineyard about vineyard workers, fishermen about the miraculous catch of fish”* [19].

Regarding the form of education, Jesus used mainly the narrative or achromatic one, which man is urged to practice. This form warms human’s minds and hearts by the will to move towards work. Therefore, the religious education has highly practical applicability. In this respect the Christian religion manifests itself and grows by spreading its faithful with the initiative, assuming an educational program teaching, able to discover the truth and the life. From the Christian point of view – the theological truth that God is the supreme person, capable of revelation, is not closed, is made known to all men to the fullness of time (Gal. 4, 4-6) in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, which inaugurates, through His sacrificial work, God’s kingdom on earth, the Church. Here's how interesting are the calls to education and training from the New Testament, made by the Great Teacher *“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”* (John 14,6) that leads us permanently, as the apostles, to preach and faith: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matt. 28,19-20). It is the creed of every Christian: either cleric or laity. For cleric religious education is an explicit deontological, pastoral and missionary obligation. The priest must be identified with *“good shepherd who offers his life for his sheep”* (John 10, 11) being a witness of Christ present with His word in your heart and his home to be able to teach others and share [20]. The ultimate purpose of religious formation in Christianity is salvation, the entry into the kingdom of God, the need for such a permanent education, having strong faith, manifested in good deeds. So the task of religious education is twofold: first to strongly install man in his faith and then get it to acknowledge another who has a different faith, so he will not live in a bad totalitarian absolutist system. Religious education models that best respond to the requirements of the school, religion and education, has been formulated and integrated over time into the educational systems, becoming universally valid and accepted for the influences upon the training and educational development of young people. Thus, Christian religious education keeps the teachers’ scientific character, but presents specific features: it has the status of a discipline of study and so it is obligatory (in some States is optional, or essentially chosen by the

pupils); it assumes the content level aspects of the confessional, but respects the secular aspect of the school at the level of goals and methods; it can be defined as a systematic study of cultural educational and religious fact, but overall they provide to human indulge methods based on rational, but selfless love completed to the love towards enemies.

The Christian religious education creates harmony in the human life but requires a continuous training into virtue, for to continuous tendency towards the fulfilment of perennial values that become axis and purpose of human life. And we not must forget that the Christian education, as phenomenology and orthopraxis, aimed at the acquisition of a great situation of gracious – holiness, that as absolutization and spiritualization of all human forces on the model of Jesus Christ and the Saints. The Christian religious education is meant to ensure continuity in time and space generations, because it keeps God's teachings and the experience of past generations, but is carried out continuously and trains man in view of the future.

Conclusion

Education is a lifelong process, is an important tool for human development. That is not complete without Christian Religious Education. Christian Religious Education must be received in the favourable time when the children are young with the soft and absorbent minds ready to absorb the moral teachings from the revealed religions. In our confused world of trouble and frustration, the only sure place of solace for man is God. The School to should create a peaceful and tolerant environment for help to the young people to grow to respect and understand different cultures, nations, societies, religions and beliefs. There is the need for schools to adopt a holistic and integrated approach in promoting religious tolerance in our contemporary society.

In conclusion the School needs to promote respect for people of different faiths and beliefs. This in no way diminishes the right to celebrate the good religious values specific for each confession. The first mission of Religious Education in public schools is to nurture moral virtues. A second aim is to initiate children/students into a religious and cultural-spiritual route, with opportunities to worship together in the liturgical and ecclesial space.

The Christian norms and values promoted through religious education have the aim to generate feelings of unity in young people, to freely unite them, as an opposed state to individualization and neo-libertine secularized thought and to contemporary life. The religious Christian education is based on the personal capacity to openness and acceptance through love of the neighbour, understanding life as a continuous flux and reflux of revealed love from altruism, embodied in Christian charity.

The results of the humanistic spirit education generally mean the acquisition of the civic, humanitarian, social behaviour etc., but which may be immoral and against normality, as are the models of coexistence of people of the same sex, accepted and legalized in some states. In contrast, Christian religious education is relating to moral norms revealed by God through Jesus Christ that are always directed towards the good of man and world, a good that is accomplished both on earth and in the perspective of eternal existence in God's kingdom.

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