

THE DISSEMINATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES THROUGH CATECHETICAL-DIDACTIC ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. *Among the axiological goals pursued in the teaching of religious precepts, the following are deemed to convey fundamental values and attitudes: developing an awareness of the role of religious teachings in the life of individuals and the community, cultivating respect for holy matters, assuming one's own religious identity, showing a sense of responsibility in the exercise of the rights and duties arising from various religious identities (confession, nation, community, profession, culture etc.), respect and understanding towards one's fellow human beings, regardless of their faiths and beliefs, and Christian love for the neighbour.*

Keywords: *Religious values, Catechetical activities, School curricula, Religiosity, Religious education.*

Among the activities whereby we can mould the character of the youth we can include, among others, religious education, religious experiences and the teaching of moral beliefs/ attitudes. Several scholars in the field of religious psychology have acknowledged that moral judgment is one of the human values, as "unconscious processes operate at the level of all the components of the human psyche"¹ and emotional experiences exert a strong impact. Certain interiorized social and moral principles that gain shape at the stage of pre-reflective unconscious processes help the child to structure and organize a universe of its own. It is difficult to draw a line between the role of *heredity* and the influence of the *environment* in the development of the intellect and religious consciousness. What is widely recognized is that the structures and processes of religious thinking are formed at various age stages. In the *Epistle to the Corinthians*, the Apostle Paul confessed, speaking about his own spiritual becoming: *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.* (1 Corinthians 13: 11).

Religious activities have moral, educational and attitudinal implications, insofar as "teenagers are invited to reflect on their own identities",² without teachers making recourse to high-minded, moralizing discourse. It is well known that at present the "*formation of a system of sound values, beliefs and attitudes cannot be achieved through moralizing lectures*",³ or through refractory attitudes towards the day-to-day realities and challenges.

Religious education is essential in promoting a moderate and tolerant expression of one's own identity, a dialogue based on respect for human dignity. In fact, religious denominations and actors acquire very high public visibility and, above all, an important role in influencing broad sections of the population.

¹ Adrian Opre, *Inconștientul cognitiv*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura ASCR, 2002, p. 12.

² Maurice Bauman, *Jésus à 15 ans*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1993, p. 21.

³ Adriana Băban, *Consiliere educațională*, Cluj-Napoca, Psinet, 2001, p. 32.

Religion incorporates a source of values, which are not just *spiritual*, but also *behavioural*.

During adolescence, young people develop social responsibility, but society can disappoint them. This may lead to states of apathy, anxiety, or psychic discomfort. We find that among adolescents the religious sentiment sometimes tends to diminish, even though their metaphysical aspirations increase, revolving primarily around curiosity and some forms of rationalization. The behaviour of the youth is usually subordinated to social regulations. Nevertheless, "at least in his spare time, man acts according to interests that reflect his feelings".⁴ As structures of trends and aspirations, feelings orient and adjust behaviour, determining attitudes, reactions and positions.

The general interest underlying the preaching of religious values concerns the education of the youth and the formation of their personality in a manner consistent with Christian values, by integrating religious knowledge in the teaching of Christian moral attitudes and by applying the doctrine of faith in one's own and in the community's life. In the broader European context of inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, religious education is promoted not only as a means of achieving internal social cohesion in Europe based on knowledge of and respect for one's own identity and the identities of others, but also as a way to prevent religious and social tensions.

The Member States of the European Union include religious education in their curricula, with two or three exceptions. The emphasis at EU level is increasingly focused on youth activities designed to encourage a culture of peace, and all the recommendations appear to suggest an integrated approach to religious, spiritual, moral and civic values.

School curricula are targeted, among others, at developing the general skill of interculturalism (in which an important role belongs to religious diversity, with respect for human rights, but without harming the dignity of human beings). The specific skills⁵ are aimed at developing some form of awareness of diversity: the ability to communicate, enter into dialogue and live together with others; teamwork and cooperative learning; empathic communication; the peaceful resolution of conflicts; increasing self-esteem; the ability to explore beliefs, practices, symbols, as well as critical thinking and reflection. Within the framework of teaching activities, the religious denominations come to assist society as a whole, promoting altruism, love, communion and mutual help among people, as the basic tenets of religious faith and experience.

At the beginning of the third millennium, social developments are fast and sometimes unpredictable, urging a reconsideration of the teacher's activities in the framework of educational systems. This, in turn, requires a rethinking of the activities aimed at moral-religious education in all its aspects. Educational reforms propose a shifting of the focus from the informative to the intuitive-formative side

⁴ Andrei Cosmovici, *Psihologie generală*, Iași, Polirom, 1996, p. 233.

⁵ *School Curricula - Religion*, Order of the Minister of National Education No. 3393/28.02.2017, Annex 2.

of the teaching process. As it is sometimes excessively focused on cognitive aspects, the traditional type of education must be completed and nuanced with teaching experiences aimed at harmonizing the cognitive and the affective-behavioural aspects of learning.

Whereas traditional pedagogy⁶ lays emphasis on book-based learning and has an intellectualist focus, modern didactics combine teaching with applicative and investigative activities. In keeping with modern teaching principles, religious education should be perceived and carried out as an act of communication with and respect for others, regardless of their religious beliefs and opinions. We believe that religious education can contribute significantly to the formation of individuals who have the power to adapt to the social and psychological demands of contemporary life.

The Apostle Paul was and remains a model in this sense. His missionary and pedagogical experiences were astounding, as revealed by his own confession: "*For though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings*" (1 Corinthians 9: 19-23).

With the reintroduction of religion in the Romanian educational system, it became necessary to build curricula for the discipline of religion, for all the religious denominations, in such a way as to cater for the students' desire of knowledge and to comply with religious values. Religious ideals are aimed at shaping and moulding moral characters, enabling them to cultivate the relationship with God and with one's fellow human beings, as well as to develop an objective and responsible moral attitude towards oneself. According to some specialists in education, "the structure of the entire curriculum religion is aimed at improving the standard of religious and moral education in society".⁷

The first school curriculum for religion appeared in 1995, under the title of *Curriculum for the Teaching of Religion in Primary and Secondary Education*.⁸ Among the desiderata⁹ of religious education in this curriculum were the following:

- the formation of religious consciousness
- the formation of religious conduct
- the recommendation of methods and strategies to be used in religious education

⁶ M. Ionescu, I. Radu, *Didactica modernă*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1995, p. 10.

⁷ Ministerul Educației Naționale, *Curriculum național. Programe școlare. Aria curriculară Om și Societate*, București, 1999, p. 5.

⁸ *Programa analitică pentru predarea religiei în învățământul primar și gimnazial*, approved by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and regulated by the Ministry of Education (Order no. 32280/1995).

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3-4.

- the definition of operational-formative objectives.

The above-mentioned curriculum was drawn up for pupils enrolled in school grades I-VIII. For those in grades I-IV, this curriculum included notions of catechism, parables from the New Testament, the main religious feasts, and the Holy Sacraments. For grades V-VIII, the curriculum of 1995 included themes that were structured along compact theological lines. For instance, the curriculum for the fifth grade focused on the Old Testament; the one for the sixth grade – on the New Testament; the one for the seventh grade – on notions of ecclesiastical history; the one for the eighth grade – on notions of catechism and morality.

Some specialists in education have noted that the 1995 curriculum lacked certain insights derived from contemporary pedagogical research and the challenges of educational psychology. This was the first religious school curriculum compiled after 1989. It therefore facilitated the organization, delineation and structuring of religious contents.

A welcome revision of the 1995 curriculum was made by Bartolomeu Anania, the Archbishop of Cluj, who supervised the translation and printing of a supplementary curriculum for religion classes for pupils in grades I-XII at the Archdiocesan Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca, in 1996.¹⁰ This curriculum had been drawn up by a group of Orthodox theologians in the United States,¹¹ specializing in classical and modern pedagogy.

That curriculum was not envisaged as an alternative to or replacement of the one compiled in 1995, but rather as a supplementary or auxiliary curriculum, as evidenced by its title. Archbishop and Metropolitan Bartolomeu listed the following reasons¹² that had led to its translation and submission for publication:

- it has an interdisciplinary structure, in accordance with the widely accepted principles of contemporary pedagogy
- each theme is in fact a lesson plan, a genuine practical guide for teachers
- it is linked to life, the subject matters for each school grade being ordered according to the intellectual ability, psychology and problems of the age in question
- it is militant, in keeping with the fundamental principle that the religion lesson does not mean primarily an accumulation of knowledge, but rather one more step the student takes towards integration in religious and community life
- is perfectible, meaning that its thematic richness and flexibility allow for additions and adjustments demanded by our specific requirements, such as those in the field of hagiography and ecclesiastical history.

The teaching content for each school grade revolves around a central theme:

- The first grade - Creation as God's gift

¹⁰ Bartolomeu Anania, *Programă analitică ajutătoare pentru orele de religie creștină-ortodoxă clasele I-XII*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Arhidiecezana, 1996.

¹¹ *New Curriculum Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, Department of Religious Education, New York, 1988-1989.

¹² Bartolomeu Anania, *Programă analitică ajutătoare pentru orele de religie creștină-ortodoxă clasele I-XII*, p. 3.

- The second grade - Love of God
- The third grade - Communion with God through the Church
- The fourth grade - Becoming unto God
- The fifth grade - Man's answer to God's call
- The sixth grade - The options of the youth in the light of faith
- The seventh grade - The Holy Sacraments and the self-aware Christian identity
- The eighth grade - The pilgrimage of mankind toward God's Kingdom
- The ninth grade - The celebration of God's gifts as a Christian joy
- The tenth grade - Personal commitment to God
- The eleventh grade - Christian ministry as the expression of faith
- The twelfth grade - Experiencing God as synergistic participation.

Let us present below a summary of the themes and objectives proposed by this curriculum for each grade. For the *first grade*¹³ the main focus is on *Creation as God's gift*. God made the world and everything in it as an expression of His love and goodness. As the child discovers the world around him, he understands that family, friends, the Church, school and everything that exists come from God. Daily contact with the world of God enables the child to understand that God is real, loving and caring. The child's faith in God is awakened and expressed through prayers of thanksgiving, praise and request.

The curriculum for the *second grade*¹⁴ is focused on the theme of *love of God*, understood as a token of the child's submission to the Creator. Through the examples of some men and women in the Old Testament, as well as through the examples of various saints, a second-grade pupil will begin to understand the relationship between sin and forgiveness in the light of God's love. Through such examples, as well as through prayer and deeds, the child learns to respond to God through love.

The curriculum for the *third grade*¹⁵ focuses on the topic of *communion, the life of the Church*. As the child opens towards the world around him and acquires the consciousness of group relations, he learns about God's people, about the relationships between humans as they are depicted in the Old and the New Testaments, as well as about elements of ecclesiastical history. By studying life in the Church, the student learns how to live his life in common with others, to give, to engage in dialogue, to cope with possible relational difficulties in a positive way.

The central theme of the *fourth grade*,¹⁶ *becoming unto God*, explores a deeper moral and spiritual development of the child. Focusing on prayer and sacramental acts related to human becoming (Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Liturgy), children begin to acquire a sacramental vision on life. They come to understand the

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

world and their own growth in the light of their faith, of prayer and sacramental life.

The theme of the *fifth grade*,¹⁷ *answering God's call*, focuses on the heroes of faith, as we know them from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, as examples of faith, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, love, justice and social responsibility. Through the study of such great personalities, the child learns to respond to God in terms of his personal faith and on the basis of Christian morality, the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus Christ the Redeemer.

The emphasis in the lessons for the *sixth grade*¹⁸ concerns the importance and consequences of *choices made in the light of Christian faith*. The sixth-grade student – a pre-teen – is becoming more and more aware of his personal freedom, which allows him to opt for what is good or what is bad. Friendships are very important now, as the pressure of age increases. Using numerous examples and teachings in the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, the student is trained to recognize the fundamental moral and spiritual Christian values and to make choices for his own life.

The subject matter for the *seventh grade*¹⁹ focuses on *the Holy Sacraments*. The teenager has left behind the insecurities of childhood. He begins to look for personal identity, discovers new qualities, tries to feel that he is somebody, while complying with the general rules of his age. By studying the Sacraments in the light of faith, the student is becoming aware of his Christian identity, learns how to pray for the sanctification of his whole existence, for receiving divine grace and remaining in communion with God.

Voyage (pilgrimage) is the theme for the *eighth grade*,²⁰ concentrated mainly on the books of the Old Testament. In the perpetual search for his own identity, the young man asks questions related to the existence of God, as well as about the interplay of good and evil in his own life. Studying the experiences and manner in which the spiritual pilgrims mentioned in Scriptures and in the Holy Tradition sought God and discovered Him, the student in this grade will become able to ask the right questions and find the answers regarding his own pilgrimage in spiritual life.

The topic for the *ninth grade*²¹ is the *discovery and celebration of God's truth and graces*, with particular emphasis on the life of Christ the Saviour and on the New Testament. The student is faced, in this grade, with important questions and decisions about friendship, life style, school, work, social issues and family life. Knowing the person and work of Christ can provide the student with a source of inspiration for making his own decisions in the light of faith in Christ, as well as of the love, forgiveness and joy that God revealed for us in the New Covenant.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

The emphasis in the curriculum for the *tenth grade*²² is laid on *commitment*, as it is found in the life and the history of representative Church figures. Willing and capable of commitment towards the ideals of life, teenagers can be inspired and guided by the examples of the great personalities in the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, as well as by the great moments in the history of Church – classical and current. A host of values and exemplary personalities can help them to develop a Christian conscience as the foundation of personal decisions.

The theme of the *eleventh grade*²³ is *servicing God and Christian ministry*. At this age, the youth are becoming more and more aware about the diversity and ambiguity of moral choices, lifestyle and goals in contemporary society. The prospect of serving God and becoming a true disciple of Christ – illustrated by the example of the Lord Himself, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles and the Saints – gives the young man the chance to think more deeply about his own choices and goals as a Christian.

The theme of the *twelfth grade*²⁴ is focused on *the Christian living unto God* in such a way as to spread His teachings and confess Him in the world. The young man is now facing new opportunities of self-assertion. Reflecting more deeply on certain essential aspects of the faith, he can build a rich and solid foundation that will allow him to have the necessary discernment in regard to his own relationships and responsibilities, hopes and fears, successes and failures, joys and challenges. All these will help him to see the religious community as a living community in synergistic cooperation with God and with the fellow humans.

The current school curricula took effect in 2008,²⁵ for the following denominations:

- Religion – The Evangelical Alliance
- Religion – The Seventh-Day Adventist Denomination
- Religion – The Evangelical CA Denomination
- Religion – The Greek-Catholic Denomination
- Religion – The Old-Rite Orthodox Denomination
- Religion – The Orthodox Denomination
- Religion – The Reformed Denomination and the Evangelical Denomination
- Religion – The Roman Catholic Denomination of Hungarian Language
- Religion – The Roman Catholic Cult of Romanian Language
- Religion – The Unitarian Denomination
- Islamic Religion – The Muslim Denomination

The general skills²⁶ targeted by these curricula are: *Defining the specifics of one's own faith in relation to other faiths and beliefs; Appropriately using the specific concepts of religion, in different communication contexts; Integrating religious values and knowledge in the*

²² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

²⁵ Order of the Minister of Education, Research and Youth no. 5230/13 .07. 2008.

²⁶ Programa Școlară, *Religie - Cultul ortodox, clasele a IX-a - a XII-a*, *Licen și Școala de arte și meserii*, 2008.

structure of one's attitudes and behaviours; Applying the doctrine of faith in one's personal life and in the community; Correlating religious knowledge with knowledge acquired in other educational disciplines.

The proposed values and attitudes²⁷ include: *awareness of the role played by the teachings of the Church in one's personal life and in the community; the development of respect for holy matters; assuming one's own religious identity; responsibility in exercising the rights and obligations arising from belonging to different identities (confession, nation, community, profession, culture, etc.); respect and understanding towards fellow beings of other faiths and beliefs; care for the neighbour.*

By Order of the Minister of National Education no. 3393/28.02.2017, the new Curriculums for religion, grades V-VIII, were approved for all the denominations. For the fifth grade, they were applied in the education system starting with the school year 2017-2018. For the other school grades, they came to be applied gradually. The religion curricula were approved for the following denominations:

- Religion – The Seventh-Day Adventist Denomination;
- Religion – The Baptist Denomination;
- Religion – The Christian Evangelical Denomination;
- Religion – The Evangelical CA Denomination;
- Religion – The Greek-Catholic Denomination;
- Religion – The Muslim Denomination;
- Religion – The Orthodox Denomination;
- Religion – The Old-Rite Orthodox Denomination;
- Religion – The Ukrainian Orthodox Denomination;
- Religion – The Pentecostal Denomination;
- Religion – The Reformed Denomination;
- Religion – The Roman Catholic Denomination of Romanian Language;
- Religion – The Roman Catholic Denomination of Hungarian language
- Religion – The Unitarian Denomination, grades V-VIII

The new school curriculum for the discipline of *Religion-all Denominations* provides a curricular offer for grades V-VIII, secondary education. The discipline of religion is laid down in the framework of education in the curricular area *Man and Society*, in accordance with the *Curricula for Secondary Education* approved under OMENCS no. 3590/05.04.2016.

Conclusions

The curriculum for the discipline of *Religion* is developed according to the skill-centred model of curricular design. The curriculum is structured in such a way as to contribute to the development of the student's educational profile in secondary school. Attention is given to what is expected of the pupils, the stress being laid on their psychogenetic development characteristics during each stage.

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

In order to ensure a coherent framework for instruction, the new curriculum²⁸ proposes a set of elements common to all the religious denominations in Romania for which classes of religion are taught in the education system: a list of general skills, some specific skills and several examples of learning activities. The general skills stipulated in the new curriculum are: Using the specific concepts of the religion in question, in connection with various manifestations of faith; Demonstrating moral behaviour in personal life and in society, in accordance with religious values; Relating everyday life experiences to religious principles, while respecting religious diversity and identity.

The specific skills and the curriculum contents²⁹ are developed by each denomination. The contents are designed in line with an *inter-confessional and inter-faith* spirit, in accordance with the current deontological and psycho-pedagogical principles. Through both general and specific skills, as well as through content items, the curriculum proposes an orientation towards a set of meaningful values, such as: respect for the other, help and support, perseverance and optimism. Irineu, Bishop of Yekaterinburg and Irbit, urged teachers of religion thus: "*Never forget to ask for God's blessing upon your educational labour for, having received this blessing, your work, care and effort will be crowned by acquiring dutiful children.*"³⁰

We shall conclude by expressing our belief that all school curricula are perfectible. In fact, what is most relevant is the way in which the teacher adapts the contents and strategies so that the teaching process may become accessible and interesting. These arguments entitle us to state that the management of catechetical-teaching activities is a difficult, complex and rewarding endeavour, during which we give and receive, in equal measure.

²⁸ *School Curricula – Religion, informative note*, OMEN no. 3393/28. 02. 2017.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Irineu de Ekaterinburg și Irbit, *Educația religioasă. Învățături pentru copii și tineri*, București, Editura Sophia, 2002, p. 25.

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