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Teachers – at the Turn of Times

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Abstract. *In a contemporary society characterized by the erosion of fundamental values, the oversizing of individualism and economic-financial values, there is required a serious investigation on some of the most important value foundations of (Western) culture that have lost their power, influence and effectiveness. Our analysis focuses on some of these: religion (God - supreme value); morality (Good - the highest value); tradition (where stability is the highest value). Also, in this context, there arises the question of the axiomatic choices that teachers should make for themselves as spiritual beings and as educators for their students. By considering these and a series of results from an earlier field investigation, the study proposes simplicity as a founding attitudinal-behavioural solution (found in the Christian tradition, from Clement of Alexandria to St. Nectarios), manifested in at least three forms: simplicity of one's state of mind; simplicity of speech; simplicity of one's conduct. This analysis suggests the convenience of simplicity as intrinsic feature, inherent in the personality of the teacher, and hence its presence in the school context, through the high capitalization and expression of the fundamental Christian model. Moreover, it opens the possibility of extending it to education, in general, including non-formal contexts.*

Keywords: values, religion, morality, tradition, simplicity, teacher.

Introduction

People live – as they know, can and want – during their times. Some are subjected by them; others try to understand them (give them coherence and meaning), and others seek to use them. The first category struggles to (re)build their identity while confronting them, trying to resist so as not to get crushed and erased by their roller. The second category seeks to decipher and outline their significance, knowing that this does not come by itself and that - in the end –all these are transitory, in their flow. People in the last category represent their own faithful expression, considering - sometimes even with pride - that they are what they should be and do what they should do. In fact, however, it seems that we all are and do as much as we can be and as much as we know how to capitalize on our times, the time of our life, the fundamental values of mankind and ourselves.

At the turn of times

We live fascinating and worrying, confident and discouraging times alike. They brought to the fore - with their ideological grounds - the individual, individuality and individualism; and it is not just the individual's pure and simple assertion, support, but the over-dimensioning of his presence in the world. All these have emerged "from the economic, political and social patterns of the modern world"¹. Emerging already loaded with the spirit of the new dawn of history, these times seem to have proposed a significant break with the past, with tradition.

Against the background of the erosion of the old values, the process of modernizing society has led to the transformation of individuality and

¹ R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, Cluj-Napoca, ASCR, 2011, p. 137.

individualism into an axiological argument. The self has thus become "a value foundation that has – according to R.F. Baumeister – filled the vacuum created by the erosion of previous religious, moral and traditional certainties".² Gradually, it was accepted as a "major source of value".³ Starting with the Industrial Revolution, "Western modern culture has struggled to turn the self into a value foundation", as the North American psychologist argues.⁴

In the acknowledged researcher's view, a value foundation is something "that can export value without importing it"; it can "give justification and legitimacy to various actions, arrangements, trials or sacrifices without the need for its own justification".⁵

R.F. Baumeister concluded that Western society "lacks stable values that can provide solid criteria for distinguishing between good and bad and for justifying the actions we take".⁶ At the same time, while the domination of economic and financial values is more and more obvious and increasingly wider, the modern/contemporary society "faces the already chronic problem of the lack of value foundations".⁷

What exactly is it that has been lost and how has this been possible? Is this "wandering" valid for the present Romanian society as well? If so, can anything still be done? If not, how has this been possible? These are only a few questions on which we will continue to reflect.

Among the most important values that (Western) culture has had and which have gradually and constantly lost their power, influence and effectiveness, R.F. Baumeister mentions:

a. *Religion* (where *God* is the supreme value)

The author finds that "Christianity no longer has the central power in modern life, the power it used to have in the past - it survives in the form of private beliefs and individual practices".⁸ Likewise, religion is now - according to the North American psychologist - "no longer the basic principle for raising children or for marital relationship".⁹ It has lost "a lot of ground as a value foundation"; increasingly fewer people "adhere to any religion or have any religious beliefs, and its effect on everyday life decreases with every passing day"; in short, in Western society and culture (pretending and aspiring to globalize), religion "has lost

²R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, Cluj-Napoca, ASCR, 2011, p. 181.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁴ Delia Muste, "Managementului timpului școlar," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 47. R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 110.

⁵ Violeta Cristina Șinar, Valer Cristian Șinar, "Educația outdoor la preșcolari," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 47. R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 57; R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 138-139.

⁶ Lia Afrim, Raluca Bancia, "Impactul activităților extrașcolare asupra copilului," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 47. R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. p. 83; R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 110.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

⁸ Adriana Denisa Manea, Ciprian Baci, "Interrelații familiale provocate de revoluția tehnico-științifică," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 103. R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 117.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

much of the power and influence it had as a dominant value foundation".¹⁰ At the same time, we cannot neglect the fact that there is a struggle, within humankind, a search for a way to bring peace, understanding, harmony, self-knowledge, reconciliation with oneself and others, accomplishment.

As far as we are concerned, it seems that for us, Romanians, religion no longer has the traditional power to provide a foundation for life and relationships between us, the force that it used to have some time ago. However, it continues to have a special significance for many of us; we are witnessing a struggle and firm attitude to preserve an identity, a culture, the depths of a spiritual life; such people manage to cultivate their original values with purposefulness and determination and, at the same time, to incorporate, more or less successfully, the new (Western) attitudinal-behavioural trends of urbanity.

We shall support our statements with arguments from the area of practical-applicative research. That is, during the interval 2012-2016 we conducted a successive series of studies on the axiological profile of teachers. Through these, we aimed to identify the set of characteristic values for a group of teachers located on each of the steps of the educational system: pre-school - 100 pre-school teachers, primary - 200 primary school teachers, middle school - 300 teachers, high-school - 300 teachers, university - 112 teachers, from two counties of the country, Bacău and Prahova. The data were analysed, interpreted and disseminated through successive communications and publications during the same period. From these, we shall only use here some data that are relevant to and support some of our ideas. For example, when asked about the first 3 values in which they mostly believe, the primary-school teachers, a part of the young university teachers and university professors with more than 20 years of experience have admitted that they place faith in God among their priorities. At the same time, when asked about the value that they believe would save humanity, a relatively small number of pre-school teachers¹¹, some of the primary-school teachers¹², an important and relatively equal number of middle-school teachers¹³ and high-school teachers¹⁴, as well as some of the university teachers¹⁵ saw belief in God as the fundamental moral mark that could give the right direction to the evolution of humanity. Such axiological foundations may constitute a necessary counterweight in terms of a growing laicization/secularization of contemporary society and a solid moral basis for young generations looking for value foundations.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

¹¹ V. M. Cojocariu., G. Albu, "Indicators of The Axiological System of Preschool Teachers", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191(2015), p. 1332-1336.

¹² V. M. Cojocariu, "Anchor-values of the Axiological Universe of Primary Teachers", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180 (2015), p. 524–530.

¹³ V. M. Cojocariu, "Is There a Set of Nucleus-values Characteristic of Teachers from Middle Education? ", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 203 (2015), p. 84-89.

¹⁴ V. M. Cojocariu, "Axiological Options of High-School Teachers – a Comparative Analysis", in *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 23 (2016), p. 663-671.

¹⁵ G. Albu, V. M. Cojocariu, "Axiological Tensions and Options in the Romanian Academic Environment: Intergenerational Comparative Study", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 171(2015), p. 24-33.

b. *Morality* (where *good* is the supreme value)

In modern life, in relations between people, morality "no longer has the power that it once had"; "once Christianity has lost its primary role in culture, morality too has completely broken off from religious anchors and started drifting", as R.F. Baumeister argues.¹⁶ When modern economic and financial life is based on competition, it is difficult for people to (still) share basic principles such as: love for one's kind, being human or a trustworthy man, loyalty, altruism, compassion, self-sacrifice.

"In the past centuries, the remarkable North American psychologist notes, values were not considered personal choices, but rather objective truths. A person could predict that almost everyone would adhere to about the same values. Accepting that values can be personal indicates the decline of the power exercised by values".¹⁷

The research results show that "morality now has a much lower role in social and personal relationships than it had several decades ago"; as early as the 1960s, "there began the media's attack on morality".¹⁸ The ideology created and subsequently instituted/induced in the collective mind has come to consider morality (moral values and principles) as oppressive, authoritarian, as an obstacle to human innovation and human emancipation. Regarding this context, R.F. Baumeister notes: "The social and economic structure of (Western –our emphasis - G.A., V.M.C.) society has reduced the importance and viability of morality as a vital way of survival. With its religious basis eroded, morality has begun to be discredited and regarded as arbitrary, personal and oppressive".¹⁹ The fall of God was followed by the fall of Good, the weakening of the authority of religious morality and the dilution of secular morality, the transcendent distant censorship has led to the need to eliminate all (official) censorship and the proclamation of the self, with his needs, subjectivity and arbitrariness, as omnipotent. For the Romanians, this transformation appears to have occurred in an accelerated manner and amplified in the name of democratic values, exacerbating, from one year to another, from one social event to another, reaching even, here and there, hideous forms, in which, for example, children no longer understand the good of their parents; young people tend to no longer recognize settlement, balance, tranquillity, temperance, wisdom, and the sacrifice of adulthood and old age. The competitive struggle, especially on the labour market, the economic and financial pressures of all kinds, the differences between peers and their contradictory opinions, the intergenerational and intragenerational interplay of mentalities, the implicit conviction that the good of the person is the priority and not the good of others,

¹⁶ R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 118. Cf. Mihai-Octavian Groza, Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspecte privitoare la educație, morală și familie în paginile revistei *Renășterea* de la Cluj din anul 1928," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 153-155.

¹⁷ R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 121.

Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Elevi ortodocși și greco-catolici la liceul „Alexandru Odobescu” din Bistrița, între anii 1925 și 1931," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 139-140.

¹⁸ R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 122.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

the idea of a necessary and purifying *bellum omnium contra omnes* generates, whether we want it or not, whether we realize it or not, an escalation of Evil, in all forms, a fragile, extremely ambiguous, polluted moral state, exposed to the liability/liquidity of the times.

The same studies conducted by us in 2012-2016 show the teachers' axiological reaction to these (contradictory) signs of time. The generic value of Good is not explicitly named in the conducted studies for any of the investigated categories. However, all the studies have revealed, for all the respondents, a *profound concern for the teacher's morality dimension*. The axiological profile of pre-school teachers, where we highlighted the first three values which they cherish mostly, includes *respect* and *honesty*.²⁰ For primary-school teachers, there are two other moral values, namely *truth* and *equity*.²¹ For middle-school teachers, *respect* is the best represented value in their axiological profile²², and for high-school teachers *respect* and *fairness* cover the spectrum of moral values.²³ In the case of young university teachers, *truth* is the central moral value, and for university professors with more than 20 years of experience, the more general term of *morality* ensures the highest weight in their axiological profile.²⁴

c. *Tradition* (where *stability* is the supreme value)

Along side religion and morality, tradition has also been a value foundation. It has promoted (and still promotes, where it is preserved) stability by transforming repetition into "a source of order, rules and value"; tradition teaches people "how to think and behave, thus offering criteria for good and evil –which, as R.F. Baumeister highlights –, is the essence of the value foundation".²⁵ It "relies on the prestige of the past, invoking the principle that the way in which things were done in the past was safer, more truthful and therefore better than the new ways".²⁶

But, in Western modern society, tradition has lost its efficiency as an axiological argument; spontaneity and freedom have grown into priority values compared to customs, authority and solidarity. Briefly, the syllogism is the following: what is related to tradition, as it does not keep up with the times, is to be eliminated; what is old is obsolete; it follows that what is obsolete should be replaced quickly and, at the same time, without reluctance or nostalgia: *people* (of a certain age, with a certain way of viewing the world and relationships between

²⁰ V. M. Cojocariu., G. Albu, "Indicators of The Axiological System of Preschool Teachers", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191 (2015), p. 1332-1336.

²¹ V. M. Cojocariu, "Anchor-values of the Axiological Universe of Primary Teachers", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180 (2015), p. 524–530.

²² V. M. Cojocariu, "Is There a Set of Nucleus-values Characteristic of Teachers from Middle Education? ", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 203 (2015), p. 84-89.

²³ V. M. Cojocariu, "Axiological Options of High-School Teachers – a Comparative Analysis", in *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 23 (2016), p. 663-671.

²⁴ G. Albu, V. M. Cojocariu, "Axiological Tensions and Options in the Romanian Academic Environment: Intergenerational Comparative Study", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 171 (2015), p. 24-33.

²⁵ R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 124.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

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men); *ideas* (about work, discipline, order, family); *values* (Good, Truth, Honour); *material goods* (houses, ways of dressing).

Therefore, we find that religion, morality and tradition no longer have the social power and emotional strength they enjoyed several decades ago.²⁷

Today, the modern self no longer needs "higher sources of value" beyond himself.²⁸ In the past, it was important to know and glorify God; it is now important to know and glorify ourselves. The moral imperative is now to consider our interests before thinking about the interests of others. Since it supports stability, the traditional should be replaced with the latest news. People are under the pressure of fashion, be it in terms of household goods, clothing or state-of-the-art technologies. The sign of their existence has become the acceptance and consumption of products in vogue.

R.F. Baumeister shows that beginning with the 20th century, "morality has become the ally of personal interest".²⁹ This does not just mean that "man has the right to do what is right for him (though this is an important component of this process), but rather that it has almost become a sacred obligation to act in this respect. The modern (Western - nn - GA, VMC) message is that what is right and good and important in life is to focus on one's own person, to know yourself as much as possible, to express and cultivate your inner resources, to do what is right for you and so on".³⁰ In a reflex arc of maximum recovery of the uniqueness of the human being, the individual self-proposes as the centre of all processes, from education to politics, from economics to finances, from social to family.

In the same vein, in Western culture, "if a relationship does not involve pleasure, understanding, satisfaction and fulfilment of self, then it is considered a failed relationship and a breakup and search for a new relationship is now justified –and sometimes even mandatory –to achieve more fulfilment".³¹ *Everything* (work, school, sermons, friends, journeys, meetings, TV shows, the Internet) must generate *a state of well-being*, otherwise everything is changed, abandoned.

Also, "the lack of a strong collective belief in moral truths (with an objective, universal nature—our emphasis - GA, VMC) can be found in several patterns, including: the tendency towards cynicism, exaggerated claims, the acceptance of moral relativism and admiration for tricks that violate rules".³²

Moral liquidity (as Z. Bauman says) expands and tends to dominate our contemporary culture and relationships; of course, in our cultural space, also.

²⁷ Lia Afrim, Raluca Bancia, "Impactul activităților extrașcolare asupra copilului," in *Astra Salvensis*, V(2017), no. 9, p. 83. R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, 2011.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

²⁹ and development of giftedness in children - Viktor Yurievich Shurygin, Lyubov Alekseevna Krasnova, "The peculiarities of pedagogical projects implementation for identification," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 1, p. 47-54; R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*.

³⁰ Dana Shayakhmetova, Fatima Mamedova, Guldana Seidaliyeva, "The development of critical thinking skills in foreign language classroom," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2018), Supplement no. 1, p. 227-240. R.F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 152.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 112.

"Morality - as R.F. Baumeister notes - has come to serve the self, and the self has thus become the supreme arbiter of good and evil. The surest way that the person can find out what's good is the process of self-knowledge that is deep enough to be able to figure out what *seems to be* good. This is the principle in which today's man believes"³³ (and perhaps the man of the times that are to come, as long as the veiled formal ideology and formal education remain the same). It seems that we are moving towards a (extremely serious) confrontation: that between society and individual, where, after society has generated a certain type of individual, the latter returns, rebellious and (self) murderous against this own queen to remove it. For, how can human personality be formed, manifested and developed other than through the transfer and assimilation of general human values? How could we exist, in the absence of a strong inner experience of a beautiful, good, truth of ours (Not just mine!). How can we become self-accomplished members of the community in which we were born and where we are becoming?

Against the background of this crisis of axiological foundations and in a world in which he has become the central landmark, the individual is justified and encouraged to be a hedonistic, prodigal, cynical and noisy consumer, these being so defining for him and his presence in the world that the one who does not follow the trend eventually tends to be labelled as ... obsolete! Society has come to need "people who go shopping more and more"³⁴, who participate in more and more (glittering and ambiguous) shows, who assert themselves in public (at any cost and by all means). The dominant ideology "has instilled people with the desire to spend, to relax and to have fun, the slogan being: Live and consume!".³⁵ There are promoted: consumption (in excess, whether it is food, clothing, cosmetics, house furnishing updating, or the latest technological inventions), the desire for free time and the (exclusive) enjoyment of the present. These are correlated with the aspiration to celebrity, with the easy and immediate acquisition of personal fame, recognition by others. Patience, temperance, reflection, care for one's neighbour are missing from the value inventory.

Caught between these (enticing) economic, financial, social, ideological, psychological, and axiological coordinates, the teacher - as experiencer of such times - is in the middle of a big dilemma: either to appreciate, stimulate, encourage (under the slogan of adaptation to the changing demands of life) the excess, the obstinate/obsessive material-financial accumulation (sustained by the acclaimed prosperity and personal abundance as a sign of success), or to appreciate, encourage and practice (driven by the principle of derision, vanity, desolation), temperance, simplicity, sobriety; either to accept and encourage the noise and

³³ A. R. Gapsalamov, V. L. Vasilyev, O. N. Ustyuzhyna, "Planning of regional personnel policy in the modern economic paradigm," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 1, p. 379-384. R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 140.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

³⁵ Almaz R. Gapsalamov,

Ibatullin Rinat R., Kaviev Airat F., "Features of estimating the effectiveness of implementation of labor actions in the system of secondary vocational education," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 329-338. R. F. Baumeister, *Sensuri ale vieții*, p. 178.

humour around one's own self, pride and ambition (to compete, dominate and/or discourage it, to be able to resist in the professional-institutional race) or to accept and follow modesty, discretion, the law of thoroughly well-done work.

Trapped in such a dilemma, it is possible for the teacher to opt for an attitude almost forgotten in our world: *simplicity*. We have in mind: simplicity of states of mind; simplicity of speech; simplicity of behaviour³⁶:

a. *Simplicity of the teacher's state of mind*

In his case, the teacher who displays simplicity creates the premises for building an elegant and formative environment favourable for the emergence of beautiful, refined, moral feelings.

In a society of excess, like the one in which we live tends to become (and perhaps the one in which we shall live), simplicity no longer comes from itself: neither the character-inner simplicity, nor that of ways of addressing or behaving. Whether or not we accept them, there are maintained phenomena such as: (media) noise, vociferation, chatting, meddling, opinion-mania normativity, sterile commentary, (cognitive and relational) self-sufficiency, boasting, (surface) extravagance, defamation, drifting of values, personal infallibility, blackmail, diversion, philistinism, and so on. Everything that happens or could happen are measured by *super* - or *hyper*-.

Against the grain of all these, simplicity urges us to be satisfied with a life without luxury and boasting, with the bare necessities, with little. It urges us to eliminate (everything) that is superfluous (empty words, exaggerated feelings, unnecessary gestures); to live in sobriety: a calm, natural, unachieved, unrefined and authentic (coming from the inside) sobriety. About simplicity, Clement of Alexandria said: "Simplicity is the skill that is limited to what is necessary, being the one that acquires all that is necessary to lead to a happy life".³⁷

A person with a simple soul is moderate and without passion, lacking in grudge or the sharpness of pride.³⁸ The simplicity of inner states is given - according to Saint Nectarios of Aegina - by "purity, honesty, sincerity, a mind lacking in cunning, pure and innocent thought, which has nothing dark and perfidious"; it includes "what is genuine and visible"; also, "cleanliness is like a garment, and firmness of character gives it worth".³⁹

A simple man "loves the simplicity of the heart"; there is no deceit within him; his eye is pure and luminous; "his consciousness is clear".⁴⁰ The simplicity of moods opposes the wickedness of the wicked, selfish and conceited, the duplicity

³⁶ G. Albu, "Simplitate, distincție și stil în educație," in Neașcu, I., Iucu, R., Marin, E. (Eds.). *Calitatea proiectelor/programelor de formare. Construcție, implementare, evaluare*. București, Ars Docenti, University of Bucharest, 2017, p.127-136.

³⁷ Nectarie din Eghina. *Cunoaște-te pe tine însuși sau Despre virtute*. București, Sophia și Metastaze, 2012, p. 364.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 364.

³⁹ Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Aspects of political theology in the spiritual autobiographies of the Orthodox space? New potential keys of lecture," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 129. Cf. Nectarie din Eghina. *Cunoaște-te pe tine însuși sau Despre virtute*, p. 269.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 269.

of the pretentious and cantankerous, the ridiculous and the arriviste.⁴¹ His face emanates light, his spirit brings up progress in knowledge, and his behaviour generates warmth in other people's hearts.

In short, the simple man (with a simple soul) is modest and deep in his feelings, thoughts and searches. The teacher will cultivate his/her (inner) simplicity, practice it daily and recommend his/her students experiences in the same simplicity.

b. *Simplicity of speech*

Considering this dimension of his personality, the teacher will be (constantly) preoccupied to use - as much as possible - a simple language, short sentences, chosen and centred on the expression of clear and distinct ideas. He will use suggestive words (filled with magic) capable of creating the story of the lesson. He will avoid long, tangled, unfinished, truncated phrases and often *clogged* with difficult, cumbersome terms and concepts (even when the syllabus itself is tight and inappropriate for the students' understanding capacities).

The teacher will eliminate preciousness through linguistic cleansing and a natural attitude; he will exclude ironies, jealousy, discouraging, despicable, demoralizing and hateful viewpoints. He will foster an atmosphere of sharing and good understanding.

c. *Simplicity of conduct*

To discuss about the simplicity of human behaviour and of our lives (as teachers) seems, if not extravagance, then merely nonsense, an absurdity, weirdness, a height of stupidity or hypocrisy. There is now almost nobody - (in Western society, to the prosperity of which all of us aspire, and many others) - "who leads a simple life".⁴² Some are absorbed/fascinated by the culture of excess⁴³; others feel pushed towards it: for the philosopher Arnold Gehlen, "man is subjected to permanent pressure that pushes him to desires beyond his immediate needs; he calls this tendency to have more and more 'the excess impulse'".⁴⁴ Non-functional (irrational and indecent) consumption tends to take the place of the functional (rational and common sense) one, natural needs within their normal limits are manipulated, diverted, amplified, marketed becoming either different or seeking satisfaction in a different way.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 364.

⁴² N. Saunders, *Cum să-ți simplifice viața*. București, Humanitas, 2012, p. 11.

⁴³ D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*. București, Baroque Books & Arts, 2013, p. 77; A. von Schönburg (2016) notes the fact that children, "as they grow, are turning into mature consumers, not knowing what *moderation* means, being taught to want everything that their neighbor has. In the extreme case, the children who have been fed from birth to baccalaureate with everything that the market has to offer will one day find themselves incapable of having any real joy"(p.150, n.d.). The author further wonders about education, how can we prevent our children from becoming manipulated by the press, immature and ready-made consumers, eager to have everything that is being praised in front of them? How to become their own masters? (*Ibidem*, p. 152). We aspire and hope that our essay will provide a reasonable answer and, at the same time, an achievable alternative.

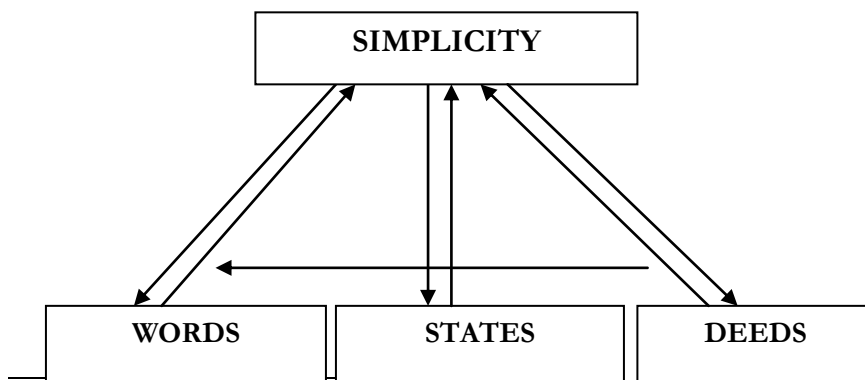
⁴⁴ A. Gehlen, apud. von Schönburg, *Arta de a scăpăta cu stil*, București, Nemira 2011, p. 171.

According to E. Fromm, we live in a "fully commercialized society" where vandalism and optimal profit are fundamental values, and where each individual is a "capital" that should be invested in the market for maximum profit (success)".⁴⁵ In such a type of society, "the inner value of man" – the famous representative of the Frankfurt Schoolnotes – matters as little as that of a toothpaste or drug" or not even that.⁴⁶

Most people become "slaves of immediate pleasures"⁴⁷; slaves without chains, as E. Fromm argues (or at least without visible chains –our emphasis - G.A., V.M.C.). In the present circumstances, "the outer chains have simply been placed inside man. The desires and thoughts with which the society's suggestive apparatus fills the person enchains man more strongly than the outer chains"⁴⁸.

Under these circumstances, more and more people "feel absolutely overwhelmed by the objects they possess and trapped by all their commitments";they lead an "exceedingly complicated life and feel that they will soon be completely blocked".⁴⁹

Resuming our plea for simplicity (the simple man, the simple teacher), we realize that as clearly as the relationship we have previously argued may be represented (Figure 1), within its inter-determination relations between the generic value of *simplicity*, states, interrelated words and deeds, as complicated and omnipresent is the mechanism that causes the diminution, until the disappearance of this value from the list of those appreciated and conveyed by contemporary society through education.



⁴⁵ E. Fromm, *Arta de a fi*, București, Editura Trei, 2013, p. 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ N. Saunders, *Cum să-ți simplifici viața*. București, Humanitas, 2012, p. 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25; the German thinker (critic) believes that the modern man, exposed to hypertechnologization and hyperconsumption, is - in fact - a mass man. He is "socialized" to the highest degree (but he feels increasingly lonely) (Fromm, 2013, p. 46). It feeds on "the cult of individuality" (p. 134). "One of the reasons for this cult, as E. Fromm emphasizes, is obvious: the more individuality disappears, the more it is glorified in words" (*ibidem*). What remains is only an *apparent individuality*. It is "cherished as a precious possession" (*Ibidem*, p. 135). And as this individuality "is one of small differences", people come to give these small and insignificant differences "the appearance of significant, relevant" revelations (*ibidem*). In short, the *illusion/surrogate of individuality* is promoted and validated through *external, transitory, irrelevant differences*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.



Figure 1. Simplicity and its desirable hypostases in human conduct

Therefore, it is important (to – still – be able) to re-learn how "to live without everything that the consumer society is trying to make us buy. The overflow - D. Loreau argues - makes us miss the great moments of life, the essential",⁵⁰ it facilitates the manifestation of vulgarity.⁵¹

It seems that "we are collapsing under the weight of an overflow pushed to the extreme, and there is no space for us anymore, neither around us, nor inside ourselves".⁵² In this suffocating context, we may experience a state of dissatisfaction coming from an overload, from an excess that, as it is, (continuously) acts upon us "slowly, but surely, thoroughly and fully".⁵³ This perverse circumstance can lead us to release, to eliminate many of our acquisitions (or intentions), as we become convinced of their usefulness, rationality or opportunity. Thus, we may conclude (as people and as teachers) that the less we have and/or the less we are concerned with and distracted by material things, objects, properties, the more we can focus on our spiritual nobility. Following such a (possible) temptation (*to have*), we may abandon the tendency of being able to cultivate our inner states (deep and educated, conscious and organized) and to adopt that which causes us to function at a superficial and mechanical, foolish and ridiculous level (towards which we are pushed by the ideology of this type of society, to which even official/formal education has been connected).⁵⁴

Awakened from this aberrant rush, caught in this powerful, vast and uninterrupted wave of accumulations, acquisitions and possessions of everything that we are being promised/lured into having, but in the (accentuated) state of discomfort it generates, the exercise of good measure pushes us to *simplification* and *simplicity*, abandonment and temperance.

⁵⁰ D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, București, Editura Baroque Books & Arts, 2013, p. 28.

⁵¹ According to E. Fromm (2013), *vulgarity* is the attitude of the one "concerned only with the appearance of things" (p. 43); it is that attitude that "does not distinguish between essential and nonessential, or one that tends to reverse the two attributes" (*ibidem*). It stems not only from an absurd impulse to accumulate and the appearance of material prosperity, from an instinctual disinhibition, but also from the "lack of animation, lack of receptivity, the feeling of being dead or from any other concern that is not related to the main task of man: *to be fully born*" (*idem*, p. 43, s.n.). In E. Fromm's view (2013), in this type of society –of material overflow–the "opportunities to do things wholeheartedly are very scarce" (p. 60).

⁵² Natalya N. Kalatskaya, Marina M. Solobutina, "School teachers: motivation direction and strategies of behavior in the conflict situation," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 347- 353. D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 31.

⁵³ Cf. Ramilya Sh. Kasimova, Nadezhda Y. Kostyunina, "Peculiarities of adolescent depression before passing the general state exam," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 10, p. 381; D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ N. Saunders, *Cum să-ți simplifici viața*, p. 27; D. Loreau, "Lack of internal order" writes – is subjectively manifested as a kind of anxiety, a fear of being, a feeling that life does not make sense and is not worth living, " p. 32.

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Simplification is the elimination, from our life (as men and as people dedicated to teaching), of everything that (we think) (unnecessarily) burdens our lives, deforms our behaviour.⁵⁵ It is based on the decision to resist and/or abandon/relinquish everything that pushes us (seductively) to move towards something other than our own natural, simple, genuine, decent and balanced existence. Simplification gives our life "a new order, a structure, an extraordinary inner coherence, lightness; it liberates our spirit from banality and platitudes".⁵⁶

At the same time, the simplification of human existence and behaviour does not aim at satisfaction and pleasure (immediate, primitive, frivolous, compensatory), but at "a lighter, more serene and more elegant life".⁵⁷ Its most important goal is "to free us from the trifles that prevent us from acceding to our own consciousness".⁵⁸ According to E. Fromm, this is "the most important step in the art of being" (i.e., one that increases and improves awareness, as well as the critical thinking ability, a mind that is always curious, constantly testing the credibility of what is being circulated).⁵⁹ Simplifying means to (re)discover our deep identity. Equally, simplifying may also mean beautifying. We dedicate our states, thoughts and behaviour to the conquest of order, care, beauty, delicacy, purity.

From this point of view, acquiring simplicity is one of the major opportunities (and results, alike!) of our spiritual evolution; and "the more we evolve spiritually, the less we shall need goods (material –our emphasis - G.A., V.M.C.) and possessions".⁶⁰ Briefly, *simplifying our lives and behaviour gives us the chance to a deep experience and mind, a neat and beautiful behaviour*.

Simplicity (and the search for it) is the right way to live comfortably and according to our own consciousness.⁶¹ Even if – we can say – "our culture is hard to reconcile with those who choose a frugal life (and a discrete and sober behaviour –our emphasis – G.A., V.M.C.), because they pose a threat to the economy and the consumer society"⁶², it is "a positive value, which (paradoxically, by lack of consumption – our emphasis – G.A., V.M.C.), it enriches".⁶³

⁵⁵ G. Albu, "Simplitate, distincție și stil în educație", p. 127-136.

⁵⁶ D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 45. Cf.

Evelina Ravilevna Galieva, Regina Rafisovna Garipova, Riyaz Gaitaullovich Minzaripov, Maria Yuriyevna Eflova, Yulduz Rakibovna Khayrullina, "The Position of Children in Family: the Factors of Influence (on the Materials of the Republic of Tatarstan)," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 2, p. 439.

⁵⁷ D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁵⁹ E. Fromm, *Arta de a fi*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*. p. 26.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁶² Ekaterina M. Alekseeva, Albert V. Chernov, "Implicit Features of Associating Life Situations with Mental States," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 2, p. 619-621; D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 18.

⁶³ Cf. N. L. Rosina, Y. A. Kolupaeva, N. N. Sheshukova, N. V. Tsvetkova, N. V. Peresheina, K. N. Kosolapova, "Formation of Self-Control in the Structure of Junior Schoolchildren's Self-Direction," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 2, p. 783-791. D. Loreau, *Arta esenței*, p. 10.

Simplicity lies in the desire to "live with less, but with more fluidity, freedom and ease, and with more refinement"; thanks to it, "we can live free from the prejudices, constraints and hardships that make us scatter our energy and stress us"; it gives us "the deep and solid belief that the fewer things we have, the freer and more fulfilled we are", the less we long for the ephemeral material goods; when exposed to the dangers "caused by excesses and opulence", to "the ever more voracious temptations of the consumer society", simplicity keeps active our reaction/attitude of not falling into "the traps of consumerism, physical and mental inertia that watch our slightest trace of inattention".⁶⁴In the end, we need very little to live truly (as beautiful, accomplished, fulfilled persons).

Simplicity means having little, as much as is strictly necessary for a decent living.⁶⁵ It leaves an open path "for what is essential and for the quintessence of things".⁶⁶It is beautiful, hiding all kinds of openings to unpredictable wonders: balance, harmony, calm, inner peace, glory, depth.

When looked at more closely, simplicity is the sign of the rich spiritual wealth and the presence of intelligence, discernment, good-taste, *limit*. It is on good terms with common sense. As teachers, we can choose and illustrate the "wealth of having less".⁶⁷Through our way of being, through what we can give to others (students, parents, colleagues, peers), we can teach them "to cherish simplicity and spontaneity, to think less of themselves and to reduce their palette of desires".⁶⁸

To live simply means to adopt a state of mind: to prefer the little and the strict necessity instead of opulence, silence instead of cacophony, "classical and durable elements at the expense of all that is fashionable", superficial and transitory.⁶⁹ It also means not only to content ourselves with a frugal meal, but also to aspire "to a higher level of thought and a superior lifestyle".⁷⁰

In short, *living simply means leading a deeper, healthier life.*⁷¹

It is, therefore, handy to understand that simplicity is compatible with sobriety, a voluntary and elegant attitude. In its requirements, the measure of wealth is given by "what is necessary and sufficient".⁷² The simple man is sober. He appreciates the "life characterized by few possessions", respectively unnecessary accessories, he surrounds himself with simple things, without ostentation, and not with crowds. The sober man does not bear the "burdens" of modernity and

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 10-12.

⁶⁵ G. Albu, "Simplitate, distincție și stil în educație," p. 127-136.

⁶⁶ D. Loreau, *Arta simplității*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Cf. S. V. Potapenko, E. B. Luparev, N. Yu. Embulayeva, E. V. Epifanova, L. S. Embulaeva, T. E. Pavlisova, "The Moral Foundations of Legal Liability (Criminal, Administrative, Tort)," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), Supplement no. 2, p. 827; D. Loreau, *Arta simplității*, p. 201.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

⁷¹ The blind rush for outer things and their *possession* seems to keep us on the surface of existence, prisoners of appearances and illusions, relativism and perishability.

⁷² Vasile Timiș, "The Dissemination of Religious Values through Catechetical-Didactic Activities," in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, p. 29; D. Loreau, *Arta simplității*, p. 223.

trendiness. His only material possessions are "those that serve the body and nourish the soul".⁷³ Therefore, sobriety is "a way of living intelligently, simply and, at the same time, elegantly".

Simplicity brings balance; it requires us to know how to appreciate the material world at its fair value, to use wisely money, time and physical goods; it means not to count on material things to be happy. It always warns us that there are (always) (multiple) riches still unexplored within ourselves.

The same note will be applied to our favourite clothing (as people and as teachers). Clothes reflect our view of life, (private) personality, show what we believe (about ourselves) and what we are, what we want to be, reveal our imagination and taste. Clothes wear "the mark of our character"; they are in dialogue with colleagues, students, their parents, "with all the people that we meet".⁷⁴

We deduct that the teacher will take (constant) care to have a simple appearance, carefully choosing colours and pieces of clothing, and displaying a direct, determined, expressive behaviour. His attitudes (in class, but also outside) will be accurate, expressing his point of view/opinion/decision honestly.

The teacher will avoid ambiguous, nervous, impulsive, ambiguous behaviour. He will free himself from prejudices related to students, their capacities, he will become aware of and test the stereotypes built through accumulated experience, will distance himself from (and self-assess) the clichés that narrow his/her possibility of adopting/manifesting a natural, dignified, constantly *benevolent* behaviour, always aware of the real needs of his students. He will always belong to each and to everyone alike, with his sincere mind and heart.⁷⁵

No matter how much we may subjectively adhere to this perspective and consider it redemptive and formative, we realize that it is no longer representative even for a significant part of the teachers. The same studies we have conducted over the period 2012-2016, to which we have previously referred, do not highlight the value of simplicity in any of the items of the applied questionnaire. As such, this analysis suggests rather an educational proposal and a deeper and more thorough approach to self-disclosure than the discovery of a reality.

Possible conclusions

People have always been in touch with the times, whether they have been subjected by and followed them, so as to be as comfortable and risk-free as possible, or they have detached themselves from them, in order to understand them (according to their ability to understand), or have doubted them and shown their imperfections, exaggerations / excesses, failures and dangers (present and/or future) to which they expose the human being.

Considering themselves as the best of all the best possible times, our times demand people to follow them with conviction and justify them, accept and take advantage of what they are offered. There is no point in wasting life with

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

⁷⁵ G. Albu, "Simplitate, distincție și stil în educație", p. 127-136.

hesitations, refusals, doubts or dilemmas. Now, it is important to enjoy the pleasure of the moment, the advantages they have (compared to others), the pleasure of the novelty (material and/or media products), the pleasure of the fun and of the (liberating) spending of one's leisure time. Nothing of all these should be missed. In fact, their ideologists argue, it is whatever each of us wants from life.

It is in these disturbing times that the teacher lives and works. It is induced to the teacher - in various forms and formal and/or unofficial, explicit and/or implicit ways - that it is legitimate and natural to be so, that he is one of the most appropriate agents to support these benevolent and legitimate times of this society and, of course, of its culture.

As a result, it would be the best option to adapt to such imperatives, tendencies and requirements, and to further ask students, in the name of well-being, prosperity, integration, and success, the same (obvious) thing.

But as schoolmen, as living and restless spirits, seekers and interrogators, as intellectuals and scholars, they are representatives of the spirit. Through them, the spirit survives in the world, over time. It does not abandon itself, and it seems that he cannot abandon itself, unreservedly, to the practical, pragmatic sense of cynical, consuming, wasteful behaviour. They are people of temper, of balance. The educators of the human soul cannot take, unreservedly, as J. Breda says, Calicles' part against Socrates.⁷⁶ It is important that there is always (and therefore, does not disappear) from society that category of people who temper the secular passions, the hedonistic, primitive-arrogant-egocentric impulses of man, and support the good beyond the temporal and derisory, to defend and cultivate simplicity in the soul, in speech and in behaviour.

This analysis suggests the timeliness of simplicity as an intrinsic, inherent feature of the teacher's personality and, implicitly, of his presence in the school context. Moreover, it opens the possibility of extending it, as a behavioural model, to education in general, including in non-formal contexts of maximum impact, especially in the family, church, other educational institutions - children's palaces, mass media, clubs, theatres, bookstores, or in activities such as trips, circles, festivals, competitions. The encounter of the value of simplicity at the formal-non-formal confluence through the presence and balanced example of the teacher (in which case the Religion teacher could experience a realistic advantage of modeller, because he may double the impact force, capitalizing and potentiating, mutually converging, the lesson and sermon, school and church, formal and non-formal, reason and feeling, experience and deed) can be a real desideratum in this respect.

Implicitly and equally complex, the promotion of simplicity can also reveal to us the fundamental Christian model (for example, Jesus, the Master, was known for his simplicity in his whole appearance, conduct, speech, thought, feeling); it may bring us closer to the Romanian tradition, in which the stranger is greeted with the utmost cleanliness and simplicity in the heart and in the mind.

⁷⁶ J. Breda, *Trădarea cărturarilor*, București, Humanitas, 1993, p. 125-126.

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The challenge is, we believe, significant: the teacher could represent a chance for the young generations to appreciate and accept to express themselves as simple, tasteful and naturally loving people.