

Church, Family and School - Factors of Religious Education

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Abstract: *When we are talking about education, generally, we refer to a formation process that is specific to humans. That, as education consists into a dialogue between persons, so it involves at least two individuals: one that is the communicator and the other one that receives the message. But when we are talking about religious education, the factors involved in it multiply, because in this equation there are factors of divine and human nature. From the divine side, God Himself and His Teandric Institution, the Church, which He established on earth for this very purpose, are involved. From the human side, by virtue of teandria, the Church is involved, and with it: the family, the school and the religion teacher, as well as the pupil, that is the subject receiving the education. This paper aims at presenting the specificity of each of these factors and their correlation, so that the purpose of religious education is fulfilled.*

Keywords: church, family, school, interaction, educational factors.

Introduction

To accomplish the salvation of the world, Jesus Christ fulfills the three ministries: the prophet-teacher, the high priest, and the emperor. As a prophet-teacher, He brings to the world the perfect revelation of God, His will and His work of salvation, the absolute truth about creation, man, the salvation and perfection of man in communion with God¹. Therefore, the Church, defined as men's life in communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, the life of communion manifested concretely through the act of faith, by participation in the same sacraments and duties accomplished by those invested with power by sacramental hierarchy aims to lead his believers by the way of salvation, especially by preaching the gospel, according to the commandment of Christ to His disciples, by sending them to preaching: "Therefore, go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son, and The Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you "(Matthew 28:19). The proclamation of the word of God in the Church is the factor that keeps man open to perfection, and keeps him on the path of perfection.

Church - educational factor "from cradle to grave, to eternity", by means of grace

Regarding this aspect of communion in the Church, Father Dumitru Stăniloae stated about the Church that it is a place where we are prepared for resurrection and eternal life, being the spiritual place in which Christ gradually communicates through the Holy Spirit His resurrected humanity to

¹ Valer Bel, *Dogmă și propovăduire*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1994, p. 141.

our humanity and His eternal life². An essential role of the religious education is to give everyone the opportunity to play an active role within the community. Salvation, the Christian educational ideal, is to reach the likeness of God in communion with the other people, and with the help of God's grace.

Therefore, by virtue of teandria, within the Church, God appears as an educational factor: God as a living, absolute, omniscient being. Both the Old and New Testament give us examples of the mysterious way in which God educates us. From creation, Adam is taught what to do to be alive forever by observing the commandment (Genesis 2: 16-17). Subsequently, the relationship between God and man were governed by the covenants made by God with Abraham (Genesis, chapter 15), God intervening into the lives of His chosen, protecting them and guiding them, communicating directly with the people through the prophets and through dreams. Revelation started with Abraham moves to a higher stage with the theophany on Mount Horeb, where Moses received the first revelation of "self-definition" of God: "I am who I am" (Exodus 3: 7). During the Moses' period there is also a concentration of revelation, an essentialisation of it in the commandments of the Decalogue. Old Testament prophets do not have to be perceived as simple predictors, but as direct mediators between God's truth and human knowledge. Their role was to produce an inner transformation of the believers, to give value to the historical time, but also to emphasize Messianic messages, to transmit moral elements, and to anticipate the Kingdom of God (Isaiah chapter 11). "When the time had fully come" (Gal 4: 4), Christ came to the world and began at his right time His teaching work, which he evolved directly until He ascended to heaven. After His Ascension to heaven, the same teaching activity takes place through the Holy Spirit, but indirectly, through the Apostles and their descendants: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14: 26). During His public activity, Jesus Christ, The Teacher of the world, used many types of education of which I would mention the individual, collective and monitoring form; Christ is the perfect teacher, because the scientifically formulated teaching principles are applied by Christ the Savior before their conceptualization by the masters of pedagogy. In the New Testament, in the Pauline Epistles to Bishops Timothy and Titus it is indicated that they had the role of overseeing the teaching within the community „[The Bishop] must be devoted to the trustworthy message as it's taught. In this way he can encourage others through correct teaching, and be able to convince those who disagree" (Titus 1: 9). But Apostle Paul also points out that in the Early Church there were three main charisms: „First, God chose some people

² D. Stăniloae, "Realitatea tainică a Bisericii," in *Ortodoxia*, III (1984), p. 417.

to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church” (I Corinthians 12: 28). It was the teacher who instructed more closely about Christian beliefs and morals, bearers of knowledge and wisdom.

We can naturally state that God is an educational factor, the Church of Christ being, as a consequence of the previous premise, an educational factor through its sacramental hierarchy that stands at the origin of Christian education, namely the catechetical schools of the Church of the first centuries, followed by parish schools and the schools from monasteries. The first organized form of teaching in the Church was represented by the catechetical schools, such as the famous schools in Alexandria and Antioch. The catechetical school in Alexandria, founded in the 2nd century, was a scientific research institute with a curriculum, professors and students, corresponding to today's university. Initially, it was very likely that the curriculum contained only Biblical exegesis, but in time, as the number and the quality of the disciples grew, it was enriched with philosophy, and subsequently came to two distinct departments: *the profane department*, including dialectics, ethics and *Christian department* dealing with biblical exegesis and Christian philosophy, as can be seen from the information given by an apprentice of Origen, St. Gregory Thaumaturgus³.

Starting with the 4th century, monasticism is organized within the Church, which will also become a cultural and religious education institution. Monasteries become true centers of spirituality and true centers of religious education. We have to say that these monastic schools were created both in the East and in the West. In these schools, religion was not the only matter taught. Other subjects are taught, but in Christian religious spirit. In this way, the whole teaching is based on Christian grounds, the model of these monastic schools being adopted by the parish schools. In our country the beginnings of religious education are closely intertwined with those of education in general. The first Romanian schools were founded by monks, the education being almost entirely religious, according to the liturgical books. The transition to secular education itself is carried out under the supervision of the Church, after the reform of the education initiated by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1864. Nicolae Iorga, in one of the lectures given at the University of Bucharest in the "School and Culture" cycle, said that "the school departs from Christianity, from the catechism lesson in the portico, from the education of the „called”, catechumens "who, of course, had to learn four things: dogma, symbolics, rituals, morals"⁴. Unlike another type of education, which is limited to a certain amount of time, to a certain number of years, at a

³V. Cîțirigă, *Bazele doctrinare ale cooperării dintre Biserică și școală*, <<http://www.creștinortodox.ro/diverse/bazele-doctrinare-cooperarii-dintre-biserica-scoala-96631.html>>, accessed 5. 09. 2018.

⁴ Vasile Gordon, *Introducere în Omiletică*, Bucharest, Editura Universității din București, 2001, p. 150.

certain age, the religious education that the Church in particular makes extends from cradle to grave, into eternity. Education is accomplished through the intercession of grace as a succession and tradition manifested by the servants of the divine word. These belong to the Church. God called them for it. The Church has formed and maintained them on the path of salvation, and so they are the instruments of the Church through which it preaches, catechizes, educates ceaselessly through word, divine worship, singing, painting and examples of holy life. *Divine worship* is the most appropriate means of religious education of the Church. Within the cult, through well-prepared sermons and catechesis, an illumination of the minds of the faithful can be achieved regardless of their age.

Family as a *topos* of the "priesthood of parents"

In the Christian perspective family is the first factor that has the role of forming the person. This is meant to introduce the child into the religion of belonging through Baptism, but also through the formation of the first conduct or the internalization of elementary states of mind. The family needs to form more than to inform. It is known that every child "absorbs" the first impressions and behaviors from the homely environment, and his character forms through mimetism and direct contagion. One of the current problems of the Romanian society (and not only) is the state of religious "illiteracy", in the sense that the family itself needs a solid religious education⁵.

Accomplishing the Christian education of children within the family becomes unrealistic without a suitable psychological and pedagogical climate, to which agreement, love and peace between family members contributed decisively. Saint John Chrysostom compares the family with a ship. The argument of the woman and the man in the family resembles the dispute between the commander and the helmsman as the ship is in danger of sinking. The parents' misunderstandings affect unfavorably all the family members who share the negative consequences of this quarrel⁶. That is why love within the family must reflect the divine intratrinitarian love. The joyful, responsible, sacrificial love that many mothers offer to their children is religious by its very nature, whatever the faith of the mother. And the attributes of the family are in fact a reflection of the divine attributes: unity, stability, holiness, equality between spouses. One of the most powerful passages of the Gospel is the validity that the Savior assigns to *preintellectual experimentation of the religious faith*. When His disciples, in an effort to maintain a mature level of preaching, tried to prevent mothers from bringing their

⁵ C. Cucuș, *Educația religioasă. Repere teoretice și metodice*, Iași, Polirom, 2009, p. 32.

⁶ C. Iorda, *Educația preșcolară după principiile Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur*, Bucharest, Sophia, 2009, p. 59-60.

children to Jesus, He "mourned." He said that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like them and that the one who does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will not enter into it. (Mark 10, 10-16).

The small child's ability to accumulate images, impressions and factual information should be religiously nurtured. As parents expect their own children to learn the words of the adult language that they hear spoken around them, as it helps them learn about the environment in which they live - the fact that the fire burns, the water is wet and the snow is cold - so they should also assimilate religious impressions and ideas. To see their parents praying; parents offer religious interpretations to what children see; children to participate in church services, where they see, hear, taste, touch and smell objects with a great religious charge. However, we must remember that, through the sincerity and authenticity of the devotion of the parents, all these will gain profoundly religious significance and serve as an introduction to the religious experience⁷.

Every member of the family is both a factor and a subject of education, by constantly learning from one another; Parents have within the family a real priestly function, they offer young children the environment for the preintellectual experimentation of the religious belief. The family is the sanctuary in which life appears, in which the first possibilities of the relationship between man and nature, between man and man, between man and God are created. In a real sense, we can speak of a "priesthood of the parents". Their duty is almost sacramental, as they bring God into the lives of their children and offer it to God. Through the cultivation of religious values, the family is the one who can direct the education of children towards eternity: „But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Mathew 6: 33). Starting from the recognition of the need to fulfill the function of ensuring the perpetuation of human generations through reproduction by the family, today the discussions that invade the public space lead us to reflect on family redefinition, the resizing of its functions, the necessity of respecting the traditions and theories about normal and abnormal, and evil.⁸

St. John Chrysostom recommends parents to be "teachers of virtue" and the goal of family education must be to gain perfection in Christ and salvation. Family education must be done taking into account a fine balance between demand and freedom. The evangelization and missionary transmission of the Christian tradition by the laity is of major

⁷ S. Koulomzin, *Biserica și copiii noștri*, Bucharest, Sophia, 2010, p. 66.

⁸ Adriana Denisa Manea, Cristian Baci, „Interrelații familiale provocate de revoluția tehnico-științifică”, in *Astra Salvensis*, V (2017), no. 9, pp.103-11.

importance within the family⁹. Since its inception, the Christian Church has been modeled according to the pattern of the family as a community of love. Apostle Paul compares the relationship between man and woman with the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5: 20-33). „*This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church.*” (Ephesians 5: 32).

The Christian education of children by their parents is a special honor to themselves because their pedagogical work is related to God Himself, since it is a beautification of man as image of God and a return to God of that sought “in the likeness”. If the commandment of divine love is worked between spouses, its fruits will be visible in the harmony and peace of the family life as well as in the character of the children that will be born, the children being not only fruits of the body but also of the Spirit: „That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3: 6). Saint John Chrysostom also speaks about the example of understanding between spouses : "If spouses live in good understanding, then their children will grow well and their neighbors will enjoy the scent of their Christian life and their friends will rejoice and the relatives will be proud of them."¹⁰

Thus, today, within the family, the temporary and often eternal future of the children is established. The urbanity („the seven years from home”) is still giving the tone and the tone of life. That is why the family remains an important factor in religious education and is responsible for it before God and the people. However, we must mention the need for family co-operation with other educational factors: school and the Church. Unfortunately, there is still that concept of parents who "abandon" their children at the gate of the school and expect us teachers "to make a man of them". But it is not as simple as one may think. Family co-operation with the Church can be materialized both by the participation in the service of all members of the family as well as by referring parents to the priest's various problems that children encounter. Thus, from an early stage, many of the evil turnings can be stopped, the Holy Fathers' recommendations regarding the root-snatching of sin, like a brood, so letting go of action until it can be too late are well known. Let us not forget that the educational function of the family continues even after the children go to kindergarten or school, and there is a need for an interaction and an educational complementarity between family

⁹ Ion Bria, *Tratat de Teologie dogmatică și ecumenică*, Bucharest, România creștină, 1999, p. 162. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "A Romanian Contribution to Contemporary Ecumenism Father Ion Bria: 1929–2002," in *The Ecumenical Review*, LXXI (2019), no. 1-2, p. 209.

¹⁰ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Problemele vieții*, Bucharest, Alexandria, Cartea Ortodoxă, Egumenița, 2007, pp. 103-104. Cf. Ioan Popa-Bota, "Manifestarea Valorilor și a Cunoștințelor Religioase în Propriile Atitudini și Comportamente: Direcții Orientative de Praxis Misionar-Educațional în Predarea Religiei pentru Gimnaziu," in *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 299.

and school. It is very important for the child to experience from the beginning of his life his father's deep affection. This is vital from a psychological and spiritual point of view; unfortunately in today's society, the father is the one who, for economic and family-related reasons, is absent from home for most of the day. Thus, it becomes a negative or absent image for the child, an issue that will later be reflected in the child's relationship with the heavenly Father. Although it involves an increased effort, fathers should try to spend more time with their children. The words of Saint John Chrysostom speak: "Work hard, you work for yourself; for your life will be easier if your sons are virtuous"¹¹. The imitation of the virtues of the parents is recommended by St. John: "Your father's blessing will condemn you if you prove to be an unworthy successor! The great thing is to support your life but also your salvation on your own struggle and not on the others' ... The honors and praises our parents enjoy are ours only if we imitate them"¹². The same saint places piety next to virtues: „Parents have a duty to educate their children as they strive for the balanced development of their body and Spirit. To teach them godliness and virtue. If they do not, they must not be called parents”¹³.

It is impossible to experience God without education: „Uncleanness, needlessness is a disease of the soul [...] We must educate our children, otherwise they will not be able to know God better [...] The uneducated man looks but does not see! [...] Teach them the mysteries of the Church, righteousness, wisdom, bravery of soul. Teach them to know themselves, for through self-knowledge they will be led to the knowledge of God. If they do not know God, what will they do to all the others?”¹⁴. To enrich your children with virtue and not with fleeting goodness ... So do not leave them treasures, but teachings, and virtues. Thus they will be distinguished through the education of the mind and cultivation of the soul ... If you educate your child properly and make him godly and loving, if he does the same with his children, a blessed chain will be created thanks to you, who have become the root of all good”¹⁵.

Some psychologists, such as A. Godin and M. Hallez, have concluded that there is some correlation between the parental image and the divine paternity¹⁶. Many teachers believe that the love of God is caused by the love of parents, the more so as the child tends to deify parents¹⁷. An imperative of

¹¹ Maica Magdalena, *Sfaturi pentru o educație ortodoxă a copiilor de azi*, Sibiu, Deisis, 2000, p. 25.

¹² Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Problemele vieții*, p. 127.

¹³ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Problemele vieții*, p. 128.

¹⁴ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Problemele vieții*, p. 129.

¹⁵ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Problemele vieții*, p. 125.

¹⁶ B. Beit-Hallahmi, M. Argyle, *The psychology of religious behaviour, belief and experience*, Londra, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1997, p. 107.

¹⁷ A. Angheliescu, *Psibologia religioasă a copilului și a adolescentului cu aplicații la învățământul religios*, Brăila, 1939, p. 45.

the "priesthood of parents" is to keep the child in contact with God in particular by his constant communion with the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist.

School - social extension of the teaching dignity of Christ

From the very beginning, Christian religious education took place in an institutionalized setting, based on the model of the philosophical schools of the time, a teacher and a group of disciples. The first Christian teacher was our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Saint John the Evangelist, in his Gospel (John 13:13), makes the confessed conscience of Jesus and His disciples about it, as follows: "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am". The group Jesus taught consisted of twelve disciples, whose names are mentioned by St. Matthew the Evangelist (Matthew 10:2-4). This group was trained and put to experiment methodically and applied the lessons learned. Their test lessons are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 10:5-17) and Mark (Mark 6:17-13), and at the end of the three years of school Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures". (Luke 24:45). In addition to this group of twelve apostles, the Church's tradition still has 70-72 disciples, including Luke and Cleopas (see Luke 24:13-35), those who were chosen for the cast to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23-26), those who will be later elected deacons (Acts 6:5) and those who will become apostolic disciples. The teaching component of the mission of the Church must first be identified in the Savior's teaching dignity and then in the missionary dynamics of apostolic early Christianity expressed in the Pauline epistle to Ephesians 4:11: „And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers". The teaching dignity has as a social extension the dimension of religious education that prepares the secular apostolate made by the religious professor, but also by every believer who has learned a martyrdom existence: „If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body?" (I Corinthians 12:15). When it comes to religious education, one has to plunge deep into history, and it must be noticed that the very basic structure of education is one with obvious religious features. The Ephesian text, corroborated with the Pauline thought from I Corinthians, places our understanding precisely in this ecclesiological register, the school being a member of the Church, and therefore requires a dimension of ecclesialism. In this ideological field, the teaching dimension to which all the teachers of religion adhere by calling and sending must be received.

As a concrete anchoring of the Apostles' referral to preaching, religious education thus addresses a number of key aspects: preaching the truth revealed and lived as a means of restoration in the Church through the

Holy Spirit in the Holy Mysteries and liturgical ministry; Creating a pool of knowledge and spiritual experiences that offer the possibility of a credible confession of faith and of an authentic religious experience, the martyrdom; authentic living in the mystical and unique body of Christ; creating rational, dialectical capacities to achieve a credible and convincing apology; the constitution of the laic group involved, assuming the authentic, philanthropic proclamation and service, a ministry that can bring order into the overly materialized and consuming social society; the formation of the "spiritual man," of the man who can assume his own responsibility and responsibility for the others and for creation either by concrete acts or by prayer and asceticism¹⁸.

The issue that is encountered today in our society is the aspect of discontinuity that appears in the curriculum of religion, but also the status of the religion teacher in the ecclesial corpus. Along with the graduation of the Faculty of Theology, when the young people choose the path of teaching, they are placed in another system, in another administrative structure, where many are afraid to assume the acts and attitude of their belonging to the ecclesial structure given by their training and the blessing to accomplish the mission in school.

Besides that, however, the success of the class of religion depends on how each religious professor assumes his mission. The Religion Teacher has the mission to initiate children and young people into faith through Christian education. It has an informational purpose to convey the truths of Christian and moral beliefs and an educative-formative one, to form the Christian personality through the communion with God and with the peers in the horizon of perfection within the Church. In order to accomplish his mission, the professor of religion must first of all have a vocation for it, a thorough theological, missionary and psycho-pedagogical training, a genuine experience of faith, dedication and preoccupation for his own continuous training and improvement.

From my limited experience as a teacher of religion, I was able to observe regretfully that it is very difficult to create a balance between the two purposes of informing and forming. Certainly a theoretical religious background is absolutely necessary, but what do we do in a situation where a 6th-grade student readily recognizes that she has almost never been to church because her parents do not see the usefulness of doing such a thing? On what basis do we build the formation of this child's soul? Here comes the idea of the necessity of catechizing adults, especially of the generations that have been "exempt" from the religious education in the schools during the communist period ... Another essential aspect is the

¹⁸ For a thorough look at these issues, see the article of Father Ioan Chirilă, "Misiunea prin activitatea didactică religioasă", in *Studii Teologice*, seria a III-a, I (2005), no. 3, p. 168.

necessity of achieving interpersonal communion at the level of the class, of the school (student-teacher relationship) and society in general. This communion involves the absolute criterion of the mission, that is love ... love that I would define in plastic terms as an exercise of accommodation for the supreme values of God. This love, once worked and carried on, will lead to the expansion of inter-human communion into communion with God, and will help us achieve the Christian forming mission of materializing the human personality as a continuation of the three ministries of the Savior. The teacher of religion has the opportunity and the mission to initiate into faith through the religious education of children and young people in an institutionalized and constant form. The re-introduction of religion as an educational discipline calls for the development of the school curricula, the development of textbooks and didactic works regarding the psychology of religion, of proper teaching methods that fulfil the requirements of education in contemporary Romania, integrating the religion discipline into a coherent and appropriate form in the National Curriculum, as well as the demands of the Church mission.

Conclusions

Summing up the actions of the three educational factors we have analyzed, we understand the implication of these factors as follows: God is an educative factor through Jesus Christ, the perfect Master; The Church, through the Holy Apostles and their followers in the sacramental hierarchy; The family, through the seven-year education provided and the student's assistance throughout schooling; the student, the subject to be educated, through the consistent and conscious participation in the instructive-educational process; School as an environment of education through the curricular area and teacher. We expect to increase the degree of direct and assumed involvement of educational partners (school - family - community) in the formation / promotion of desirable social models, individualities with respectable civic, intellectual and cultural integrity.¹⁹ In the past years, the Church's mission has been particularly dynamic through the catechesis of youth, involvement in the prevention of school abandonment ("Choose school") and the social involvement of the Church through young people (missionary-philanthropic contests initiated by the Romanian Patriarchate through the Theological-Educational Department). "What do we have to do?" First of all, to continue the current projects and to seek new ideas for the involvement and activation of our children and young people. By strengthening the feeling of belonging to the ecclesial community of the children and youth we do nothing but consolidate the future "living

¹⁹ Adriana Denisa Manea, "Innovation in the Management of Educational Institutions", in *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, CCIX (2015), no. 3, p. 310-315.

walls" on the foundation of Christ. By this we can show that the Church focuses not on "investing in buildings of concrete", as it is acused, but on building the souls of its faithful.

The major suggestion that can be taken over by the Church as a missionary "pattern" is to coordinate and supervise a national program of continuous improvement, teacher training, a program that aims to teach religion inschools in a positive and creative way (like the PREL project), respecting the confessional specificity of each student. This would reduce the accusations of exclusively Orthodox indoctrination brought to the class of Religion in Romanian schools, and we could also preventthe danger of "religionism" of some of our college teachers.

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