

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, A FAMILY, SCHOOL AND CHURCH DESIDERATUM IN POSTMODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

Religious education plays an important role in the moral and psycho-emotional development of children and young people. In order to achieve a sound education of this kind, there must be close cooperation between the family, the school and the Church. If the family is the environment in which the human person is born and grows up on the foundation of the biological and cultural heritage of the parents, the school strives to place what has been nurtured in the family in the wider social context; in other words, it presents the child with the common and perennial values of society as a whole. At the same time, the Church comes to develop and direct human development in accordance with the absolute meaning of these values, which find their meaning only in a living relationship with God. Religious education and the values inculcated in the minds of children through these three institutions are opposed by the postmodern paradigm which seeks to relativise all these values, not accepting that there is a transcendent truth which generates them.

Keywords: religion; education; postmodernism; family; school; Church;

INTRODUCTION

In the context of post-modern society, when fundamental values are relativised and education of all kinds is subject to a paradigm shift, children and young people need support from FAMILY, SCHOOL and CHURCH, as only through clear guidance and the portrayal of authentic role models will they be able to have a well-directed discernment in the face of the challenges that lie ahead. This can only be done in optimal parameters through the synergistic action of the three institutions mentioned above. If the family is the environment in which the human person is born and grows up on the foundations of the biological and cultural heritage of the parents, the school endeavours to place what has been nurtured in the family in the wider social context; in other words, it presents the child with the common and enduring values of society as a whole. At the same time, the Church comes to develop and direct human development in accordance with the absolute meaning of these values, which find their meaning only in a living relationship with God.

1. FAMILY, SCHOOL AND CHURCH, DEFINING FACTORS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the historical course of the Romanian people, the intertwining of the above-mentioned institutions is evident: "It is a well known fact that the first schools appeared in Romania under the patronage of the Church, thanks to enlightened clergymen who combined

the art of education with their own pastoral mission for the benefit of our nation. We know the schools in the Șcheii of Brasov, near the great monasteries, which together with the first hospitals (sickrooms) and printing presses, enjoyed the support and care of our Orthodox Church."¹

The impressive openness that the Church showed towards education and culture can be seen from the fact that the ecclesiastical printing centres contributed to the standardisation and sedimentation of the Romanian language, the books printed in Targoviste (Dealu Monastery) and in Brasov circulating throughout the Romanian provinces.² In addition to language, these books brought with them the hope of national and religious unity, being the most effective and the earliest means of cultivating national sentiment. A concrete example, which is part of this historical-church and national logic, is the work of Deacon Coresi who contributed to the crystallization of the literary Romanian language.³ He laid the foundations for the introduction of the Romanian language into worship, a work which was to be completed through the devout involvement of the Holy Hierarch Martyr Antim Ivireanul.

Returning to the close link between Church and School, it must be said that in our country, until 25 November/7 December 1864, when the Law of Public Instruction was adopted, Romanian education was conducted within the Church. This law, even if it removes the school from the patronage of the Church and places it under that of the State, does not represent an elimination of Christian education and values. It should be noted that it provided for the school subject of religion, which occupies a prominent place in both primary and secondary education.

Unfortunately, later, when the communist dictatorship was established, the "Decree on the reform of education in 1948" took the subject of religion out of school.

"The hard years of the communist dictatorship, with its humiliating atheism imposed in state schools, against the will of a religious people, have taught us not to want culture without faith, science without spirituality, matter without spirit, knowledge without communion, philosophy without hope and, above all, school without soul, i.e. education without religion, especially at the age of existential questions and spiritual formation of young people."⁴

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, "Moral and Religious Education" was reintroduced in primary, secondary and high school education, as stipulated in the protocol concluded in 1990 between the Ministry of Education and Science and the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, starting to be taught in the 1990-1991 school year. With regard to this school subject, the Romanian Constitution, approved by national referendum on 8 December

¹ PROF. LUMINIȚA PREDĂ, „Școala și Biserica-izvoare de știință, lumină și virtute, două instituții fundamentale ale neamului românesc” [“School and Church - sources of science, light and virtue, two fundamental institutions of the Romanian nation”], in *Almanah Bisericesc*, Arhiepiscopia Târgoviștei, Târgoviște, 2013, p. 226.

² ADRIAN IGNAT, *Aportul Bisericii la Marea Unire de la 1 Decembrie 1918 [The contribution of the Church to the Great Union of 1 December 1918]*, Ed. Universitară, București, 2011, p. 16.

³ PR. BOGDAN DEDU, „Primul mare tipograf în slujba limbii române” [“The first great printer in the service of the Romanian language”], *Ziarul Lumina* (28 iunie 2008), p. 6.

⁴ † PF. Daniel CIOBOTEA - Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church], *Cuvântul Preafericitului Părinte Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, cu ocazia Congresului Internațional de Teologie Educația religioasă a tinerilor în contextul secularizării actuale [Word of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, on the occasion of the International Theological Congress Religious Education of Young People in the Context of Today's Secularization]*, București, Palatul Patriarhiei, 3-7 septembrie 2016, <https://basilica.ro/educatia-religioasa-formarea-tinerilor-pentru-viata/>, Accesat la 08.03.2019.

1991, states: "The State shall ensure freedom of religious education, according to the specific requirements of each religion. In State schools, religious education is organised and guaranteed by law" (Article 32(7)).

Therefore, since 1990, the subject of Religion has been taught without interruption until today, as part of the Common Core. It should be noted that in 2014 a number of changes occurred as a result of Decision No. 669 of the Constitutional Court of Romania, which is also evident from the words of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, delivered on the occasion of the International Congress of Theology Religious education of young people in the context of current secularization: "The subject of Religion still retains its place in the school's curriculum. Since 2014, following the publication of Decision no. 669 of the Constitutional Court of Romania, the enrolment for this subject is made freely by written request of the student of age, respectively the parent or legal guardian established for the minor student. Therefore, at the beginning of 2015, 2,167,485 applications were registered in the Romanian Integrated Education Information System from a reporting base of 2,371,697 pupils, i.e. 91.39%. In support of the school subject of Religion, in 2015 the Association of Parents for Religion Class and the Association of Religion Teachers were established, and the Romanian Patriarchate developed the document Strategic Plan for increasing the quality of religious education. In order to develop cooperation to support and improve the Religious Education, 5,642 partnerships between parishes and schools have been concluded throughout the country, in the framework of which various in-school and out-of-school activities have been carried out." ⁵

The prompt involvement of parents, pupils and civil society to counter attempts to put religious education on the back burner has shown that it is by no means unimportant, but on the contrary must persist in Romanian schools. It has an integrative character and not a separatist one, as it has been tried to assert. Religious education is a bond that enhances and gives meaning to the knowledge of the other disciplines, in order to form together enlightening and edifying points of reference for a life lived in communion and co-responsibility for the common good.

Not only Romania recognises the importance of teaching religion, but most European countries and beyond have included the subject of religion in the public education system. If we want to look at the number of hours, in general, European pupils have one hour of religion per week, but pupils in countries such as Germany, Italy, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Croatia and Cyprus have two hours of religion per week, and Belgian pupils even have three hours per week.

It is therefore widely recognized the importance of the trio FAMILY, SCHOOL, CHURCH for the proper development and education of new generations, a fact proven by history, which shows that the periods in which attempts were made to banish God from society were periods of time conducive to the manifestation and proliferation of totalitarian ideologies; see in particular the communist period which was noted for its opposition to any form of religious education and religious manifestation in general.

"This totalitarian regime, like all others, "promised the realization of a perfect social order, a surrogate of the Kingdom of Heaven. The main ideas and values of the utopian ideologies of the last centuries are ideas and values that parasiticise and secularise the basic

⁵ † PF. D. CIOBOTEA - Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church], *Cuvântul Preafericitului...[The words of His Beatitude...]*

values of Christianity. This is why these ideologies have no concrete content, but rather tend to absolutise a form of historical organisation and misinterpreted principles based on a mistaken anthropology. That is why these ideologies also have in common their opposition to Christianity. I could even say, without fear of exaggeration, that when an ideology hates Christianity it is a sign that that ideology is utopian and totalitarian."⁶

2. POSTMODERNISM AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In order to understand how postmodernism relates to religious education and religion in general, we need to look at some of its characteristics. This concept refers to a current that emerged towards the end of the 20th century and indicates a departure from the elitist culture of modernism towards an eclectic and populist approach.⁷ Postmodernism is the term of reference applied to a wide range of developments in the fields of critical theory, philosophy, architecture, art, literature and culture. The various expressions of postmodernism stem from, go beyond or are a reaction to modernism. If modernism sees itself as a culmination of the search for an Enlightenment aesthetic, postmodernism is concerned with how the authority of ideal entities (called metanarratives) is weakened through the process of fragmentation and deconstruction.⁸ Jean-François Lyotard has described it as a "distrust of metanarratives"⁹; in his view, postmodernism attacks the idea of monolithic universals and instead encourages fractured, fluid and multiple perspectives.¹⁰

Postmodern philosophy replaces the realist position with an anti-realist position. Its view is that reason serves as a false claim to understanding the world and our true nature. Postmodernism holds that it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independent reality. Epistemologically, having rejected the notion of an independent reality, postmodernism denies that reason or any other method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge of that reality. Postmodern contours of human nature are consistently collectivist, holding that the identities of individuals are constructed largely by the social-linguistic groups to which they belong, those groups varying radically in the dimensions of gender, race, ethnicity and wealth.¹¹

The values of postmodernism are the opposite of modernism: instead of natural reality, anti-realism, instead of experience and reason, social-linguistic subjectivism, instead of individual identity and autonomy, different races, genders and class groups, instead of human interests as fundamentally harmonious and oriented towards mutually beneficial interaction, conflict and oppression, instead of valuing individualism in values, markets and politics, calls for communalism, solidarity and egalitarian restrictions, instead of valuing the achievements of science and technology, suspicion that tends towards outright hostility.¹²

⁶ PR. LECT. UNIV. DR. SORIN BUTE, „Creștinul în cetate” [“The Christian in the city”], in *Almanah Bisericesc*, Arhiepiscopia Târgoviștei, Târgoviște, 2019, pp. 179–180.

⁷ SORIN PÂRVU, *Dicționar de postmodernism [Dictionary of postmodernism]*, Institutul European, Iași, 2005, p. 223.

⁸ STEPHEN R. C HICKS, *Explaining Postmodernism. Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, Ockham’s Razor Publishing, 2011, p. 189.

⁹ JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD, *Condiția postmodernă. Raport asupra cunoașterii [The postmodern condition. Report on knowledge]*, translated by CIPRIAN MIHALI, Idea Design & Print, Cluj, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁰ NICOLAE TURCAN, *Postmodernism și teologie apofatică: o apologie în fața gândirii slabe [Postmodernism and apophatic theology: an apology to weak thinking]*, Limes, Florești, Cluj, 2014, pp. 33–34.

¹¹ S. R. C HICKS, *Explaining Postmodernism...*, p. 6.

¹² S. R. C HICKS, *Explaining Postmodernism...*, p. 15.

For postmodernists, there is no canonical understanding of the world or of ourselves, such understandings are subjectively constructed by different groups in society, groups that are in necessary conflict. Therefore, the existence of an objective truth is not accepted,¹³ and this explains the relationship that postmodernism has with the main theme of this paper, religious education. More precisely, religion presupposes the existence of a transcendent truth to which human development must relate. For us Christians, this fundamental principle is Christ, the One who tells about Himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John. 14, 6). A religious education does no more than provide the child with a transcendent reference point to which he or she can relate, which makes him or her resistant to post-modern relativism.

Thus, attempts to remove religious education from the public sphere in general and from schools in particular are nothing more than crystallisations of the aforementioned trend. Like any ideology, postmodernism has good intentions at first glance; it wants, for example, equity, which at first glance seems a laudable desideratum. But if we look more closely at what the term proposes, we will see that it cannot be about the much-desired equality of opportunity, but rather it is about a totalitarian egalitarianism, a "Procrustes' bed" that in the name of political correctness puts the equal sign between value and non-value, eliminating any kind of hierarchy.

Moreover, the followers of postmodernism are ready to reduce the rights and freedoms of the majority, just to put it on an equal footing with the minority, which is often seen as discriminated against, without this being true. A case in point is the 2006 attempt to remove religious symbols from public schools on the grounds that their presence in classrooms would offend those with different religious beliefs from those of the majority of pupils. If we think in this paradigm, national symbols should also be removed on the grounds that they morally affect those of other nationalities who learn in Romanian schools. We see how a simple application of logic disarms and shows the hilarity of these ideological approaches.

The same premises underlie the undermining of religion. Thinking in this way, we could ask that history, Romanian language and similar classes, which cultivate the ethos to which we belong, be replaced by neutral ones, which do not offend in any way those of a different cultural background.

Every space has its own cultural framework that cannot be ignored. People with other backgrounds should not be offended by this framework and want to dilute it, but should adapt to it without giving up their own background, but rather enrich the environment they have entered with the positive notes of their own culture.

It is also argued that a child does not yet have the discernment of an adult and it is unfair to educate them in a religion they have not chosen. Rather, some say, it should be educated neutrally so that it can choose later. What those who make such claims do not understand is that a person cannot be born, raised and educated neutral; it is nonsense! When the child is born, it cannot choose for itself, but the parents choose on its behalf what they think is right; that is how nature works. The child cannot choose, for example, the language to learn; that would mean that no language should be spoken around him until he comes of age, or that all the languages of the world should be spoken so that he can choose without being forced. Or, taking this reasoning further, we don't even know whether a particular child

¹³ N. TURCAN, *Postmodernism și teologie apofatică [Postmodernism and apophatic theology: an apology to weak thinking]*, pp. 135–136.

will want to be fed exclusively plant and/or animal food; that would mean that they should not be fed until the age of majority, which is absurd.

Neutrality with regard to education and life in general is therefore just an unenforceable philosophical principle. A human person develops within a certain cultural, social and religious framework, from which he or she cannot disregard. Of course, he can change his religion, for example, when, having reached adulthood, he considers that another relationship to God is the right one, but in no case can he be brought up in total neutrality until then. This premise is also reinforced by the great philosopher René Descartes in his 'Discourse on Method'. He states: "(...) I obey the laws and customs of my country, steadfastly keeping the religion in which God has endowed me to be brought up from childhood, and to conduct myself in all other respects according to the most temperate and remote opinions of excess, generally enforced by the most judicious people among whom I shall have to live."¹⁴

Religious education is therefore indispensable in the formation of new generations. It provides a solid foundation on which to build character, and it also brings benefits that cannot be extracted elsewhere.

One of the benefits of religion is that it shows the young person that everything makes sense. At the age of turmoil and disappointment, which in adolescence seem like real catastrophes, he still has a firm anchor in the transcendent of religious conviction. He knows that his existence means more than biological life and that his goal is higher than the one he has just missed, and because of which he feels he has lost everything. Even if he has nothing left, he knows that he still has Someone he will never lose. He has a loving God, who in His mercy allows obstacles, precisely so that the effort and sacrifices he will make to overcome them will train him, make him stronger and build him up.

Neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl said: "he who has a "why" to live for can endure almost anything"¹⁵ and he also states that "there are three ways in which man can find meaning in life. The first of these is work, what is called 'active life', through which man 'creates values' or 'performs a specific act'. The second path is more of a contemplative "passive" one, in which man does not create, but receives as a gift something he can enjoy - beauty, goodness, truth from nature or culture, or the love of a person. The last way in which man can find meaning in life is suffering. In the latter case, the meaning may be precisely to endure with dignity and courage the suffering that is imposed on him and that he cannot remove."¹⁶

All these elements that can bring meaning do nothing but converge towards the Supreme Meaning, otherwise neither work, nor contemplation, nor suffering, nor life itself would have any meaning; it would be nonsense to live only to die.

Another benefit of religious education is the way it shapes character. The child is aware from an early age that he is always in the presence of Someone who protects him, who loves him, and who does not want him to do bad things that could jeopardise his development. God warns him through the voice of conscience when he has strayed from the path of good, truth and beauty. Thus the doing of good and freedom from evil become imperative, and the

¹⁴ RENE DESCARTES, *Discurs asupra metodei de a ne conduce bine rațiunea și de a căuta adevărul în științe [Discourse on the method of rightly guiding our reason and seeking truth in science]*, Ed. Științifică, București, 1957, p. 52.

¹⁵ VICTOR E. FRANKL, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții [Man in search of the meaning of life]*, Ed. Meteor press, București, 2009, p. 89.

¹⁶ V. E. FRANKL, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții [Man in search of the meaning of life]*, p. 80.

quality of the deeds must be unquestionable, since he does not do them to satisfy the demands of a human being, but does them for the evolution of his whole being and in the presence of the all-knowing God.

The awareness of the permanent presence of the Creator is an extremely important thing, a thing that makes both the child and the young person responsible, constantly awake, vigilant in distinguishing good from evil and truth from lies. It is precisely this responsibility that religious conscience gives that makes some people want it out of the public arena and especially out of school. The problem of eliminating God, before whom you feel responsible, is not new, but has existed since ancient times. From the fratricide of Cain, who kills Abel because he constantly saw in him the icon of the Creator, to the modern and postmodern period, when attempts are made to relativize His presence, man wants to eliminate the Witness who gives voice to his conscience. This leads Nietzsche to say, "God is dead!". We are continually killing him! But why? The philosopher also answers in "Thus Said Zarathustra", when "the most hideous of men" asks him to guess who he is. Zarathustra replies: "I know you too well (...) you are the murderer of God (...) You could not bear to be looked at by Him-at Him who continually looked at you, a man more repulsive than all! Yes, you took revenge on this witness!"¹⁷ In other words, we kill God, we try to convince ourselves that He is absent, because we actually run away from the responsibility that His presence gives us.

CONCLUSION

In addition to integrity and responsibility, religion also instills in young children a love for all people and all things. No philosophical ethic or ethic of any kind has spoken of love at the highest level until Christianity. There were precepts that urged love for one's fellow man, but nowhere was there talk of loving one's enemies. Thus this kind of higher and self-sacrificing love is presented to pupils of all ages. Religion class is the time when we learn that we must love people, animals, all of nature and even those who do not have a very cordial relationship with us. In addition to this, the same lesson also presents historical events, role models and the behaviour and attitudes we should adopt in one situation or another.

All these and more are brought into the souls of children through religious education. The skills that children come with in the FAMILY begin to be systematized and developed in the SCHOOL, which together with the CHURCH proceeds to nurture the key man of society.

In conclusion, we can say that in an increasingly troubled society, children's developing characters need the synergistic and beneficial action of the three guiding lights mentioned above. Only together can they bear the best fruit and educate people who are constantly advancing towards the fulfilment of existential meaning.

¹⁷ FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Aşa grăit-a Zarathustra [Thus said Zarathustra]*, Imprimeria Coresi, Bucureşti, 1996, p. 445.

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