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## Religious Education and Teachers’ Role in Students' Formation towards Social Integration

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### Abstract

Religious education is a demanding area of pedagogical education, as there is no universal method to systematically insert religious principles in the children's education.

The theory and methodology of the curriculum, instruction and evaluation require certain skills from teachers, such as: a great interest in the adequacy of the training process to the needs of each individual, the ability to adjust to different situations, a holistic assessment of the students’ performance, the involvement of the students in the learning process, etc. These skills are equally indispensable for the teacher of Religion, who must have greater sensitivity and empathy, and also deep religious convictions, reflected in their behaviour and in their way of relating with the student.

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### 1. Introduction

Religious education aims at cultivating and developing the religiousness of an individual, that is, in C. Cucos’s words, a psychic state derivative from faith, in a supreme, eternal and immutable principle. (Cucos, C.,1996).

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Religious education, alongside with moral education, has constituted an axis for the educational system drafted by the greatest educationalists along the ages.

Religious education has, primarily, a moral role. In modern world, there is a tendency to consider moral life as separated from Christianity. Moral codes are not a product of human reason, as in philosophical ethics. They are revealed to us by deity. God is not just a construct of speculation. Religious education is also important from a cultural point of view, as spirit transcends human nature through culture. Everything worthy of admiration created in human culture owes to a great extent to Christianity. Socially, religious education represents the formation of an individual in community, but also for the community. Along their entire life, individuals strive to practice the Christian virtues, in view of eventually achieving Christian felicity. Religious education is a human-specific act, consciously pursued by an educator, on the grounds of some principles and aided by specific means and methods, being, at the same time, supported by love, trust and freedom. The aim of the education through religion is to mould the students' religious and moral character.

In order to achieve the fulfilment of the religious education process, with its specific fundamental concepts, the Christian educationalist must have deep knowledge of our national culture, impregnated with the values of Romanian Orthodoxy.

“A direct, deep and complete knowledge of the folk spirit and of the Romanian religiousness, the intellectual diving into its historical mystery, will provide the most valuable material and suggestions for a modern philosophy and theology to fill and cleanse the space stained and poisoned by gregarious atheism. By rejecting artificial, borrowed philosophies and theologies, that have always led to totalitarian heresies, we must walk the path of appropriating our philosophy and theology through folk spirit, as it is here where one may find the most significant initial themes of Romanian philosophy, the strength of Romanian Orthodoxy, which should represent the points of reference in the Romanian philosophical thinking, and should, at the same time, offer world's philosophy and theology inestimable contributions.”

In the present-day context, the Christian educationalist must consider a few essential aspects during the educational act:

**Firstly**, he must attempt to develop the *order, discipline, research and analysis spirit* in the children's minds and souls. Thanks to this spirit was the Western culture capable of achieving great accomplishments in science and technology.

**Secondly**, by opposing the entire present-day European culture, the Christian educator must affirm the presence of the Spirit at all levels. He must lay emphasis on the presence of the Spirit not only in Church, but also in the entire cosmos, thus putting an end to the spiritual, moral and ecological degradation of the world we live in. The Spirit must be present in the soul of the believer, inasmuch as in the mind of the scientist, so that it could break the concept of autonomous and atheist reason opposing God. The Christian educator must also affirm the presence of the Spirit not only inside the soul, but also inside the body, in order to suppress the rebirth of the neo-pagan vitality. The major difference between Western and Eastern cultures is *pneumatology*. The spiritual crisis which confronts the European culture today is the result of the lack of *pneumatology*. In order to be capable to contribute in the work of education and spiritual renaissance of our country, the Christian educationalist must be, first and foremost, a *pneumatologist* who appeals to the Holy Spirit.

In the case of Religion, the Christian educator is bound to overcome the opposing views of a world in perpetual transformation in the process of teaching-learning, in order to give his students the chance for integration in a society moving towards spiritual, scientific and moral evolution. Through religious education, the school leads a safe and sound way for students to acquire and master theological knowledge, and give them the possibility to develop strong characters and moral and spiritual traits that fortify the conscience of duty towards God.

## 2. The Christian educator's competences. Requisitions of his activity

The recent evolutions and paradigms of the theory and method of curriculum, instruction and evaluation require from teachers – no matter what their speciality is – a significant number of skills and competences:

- *the preoccupation for a teaching process appropriate to the needs of each individual*: the ability to identify the necessities/ domains of development for each student, to identify the rhythm of development (accepting that development has different rhythms and stages)

- *the ability to adapt learning situation, learning contents and educative materials to the individual traits of each student*, by encouraging the independent study and initiative;

- *the maximization of every child's potential* (especially in the cases of disadvantaged children); the ability to diagnose the needs of each student in terms of physical, cognitive, affective, socio-economic or cultural characteristics;

- *the holistic assessment of performance*: the ability to adapt the evaluation methods to the entire development of the student and to use evaluative information for planning teaching-learning activities; elaboration of the assessment tools; interpretation of the results of the evaluation in view of making decisions and amending problems; adequate usage of the alternative means of evaluation;

- *the adaptation to change*: the ability to identify various changes in society and the nature thereof (directions, trends, quality); to evaluate actions/practices of the students and suggest and implement necessary amends to them;

- *the students' involvement in the learning process*, development of their motivation, negotiation of various rules. The teacher should favour the definition of professional projects, as well as teamwork.

The idea of an “education for all” (or, better put, of an education adapted to individual needs) requires from the teacher the ability to adapt to students’ diversity. He must always support their acquisitions, and he must, at all times, motivate them to achieve superior performance, together with the development of the skills necessary for the formation of a balanced personality and for the integration in a society of values.

The competences and requisitions mentioned above are also compulsory in the case of the Religion teacher. However, considering the specificity and character of the religious education, he must also possess a greater sensitiveness, strong belief in God, empathic and persuasive qualities, profound religious beliefs, reflected in his behaviour and in the way he relates to others.

In order to better emphasise the role of the Religion teacher in the students’ intellectual and spiritual formation, we present, in the following table, the traits of three types of educators directly involved in the formation of the students’ personality:

- the teacher who teaches Religion;
- the teacher who teaches other disciplines provisioned by the curriculum;
- the parent as educator in the family environment.

Table 1. A comparative analysis of the specificity of intervention for the three categories of educators

STAGE	RELIGION TEACHER	TEACHER SPECIALISED IN OTHER DISCIPLINES	PARENT AS EDUCATOR – IN THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT
QUALIFICATION	Theological Seminary, B.A. in Theology, Teachers’ Training certificate; general and specific competences; professional experience.	College/ B.A./ B.S. degree, Teachers’ Training certificate; general and specific competences; professional experience.	Maturity, willingness, guidance from the Holy Spirit, life experience.
METHODS	Not limited to formal teaching – promotes indirect influencing methods of stimulating faith and sensitivity.	Limited to formal teaching methods, group-oriented, specific to the school environment.	There are no limits in choosing informal, individualized methods.
OBJECTIVES	The objective of teaching is mental knowledge, but especially spiritual knowledge, the	The objective of teaching is mental knowledge, with emphasis on “the right	The objective of education is soul knowledge, with emphasis

	development of faith and sensitivity.	answer”. Learning is measured by the knowledge of facts.	on understanding. Learning is measured by the understanding of ideas and the acquisition of skills and habits.
<b>LEARNING CONTENTS</b>	Praying and the study of Bible are central to the teaching of religion ; the class will not be reduced to teaching various information and facts	Limited to a certain domain	There are no restrictions as to what parents can talk to their children
<b>CURRICULUM</b>	The teacher must use the same curriculum and the same materials for all the children in the class, but he must also be able to adapt to specific contexts and needs (specific needs of the students as an individual and social requirements, without deflecting from the ethical norms).	The teacher must use the same curriculum and the same materials for all the children in the class, having limited possibilities to adapt to specific, individual needs and interests.	The parent is free to use a variety of contents and materials fit to the needs and interests of each child.
<b>CREATIVITY</b>	The teacher gives the student the chance to discover new things, to ask questions, to look for answers, and to actually get involved in various activities.	Creativity is a goal aimed at in various degrees in all school disciplines, except for the situations in which emphasis is laid on « the right answer ».	The parent should be able to elicit creativity by ensuring a dynamic and practical environment. Children learn to explore, to discover, to ask questions and look for answers.
<b>MOTIVATION</b>	Teaching Religion is a profession chosen with both sensible and affective reasons, which is why the desire to open the students a path to spirituality through the formation of a faultless moral and social character is of the essence.	Teaching is a profession generally chosen based on sensible reasoning, which is why the teacher primarily aims at maximizing the potential of each student.	Parenting is motivated firstly by the love for children and obedience to God. Secondly, it is important for parents to provide the optimal conditions for the education of their children.
<b>DISCIPLINARY METHODS</b>	Disciplinary methods should be applied at all times with love, as a prerequisite of the teacher-student relationship. They must be used in view of instructing children in what moral, religious and social behaviour is concerned.	Disciplinary methods are limited due to legal constraints. Since there are no family connections, discipline is formal, strict and authoritative in most of the cases. Disciplinary methods are used as sanction for unacceptable behaviour.	The parent is able to use any effective disciplinary method, as long as they are applied with love, a prerequisite of the parent-child relationship. They aim at moulding the character and behaviour in view of the child's future integration in society.
<b>RESOURCES</b>	The Religion teacher does	The use of resources is	Unlimited opportunities in

	not use approved materials exclusively, he must also create and diversify his resources.	restricted to approved materials. The teacher is not always capable to use the best resources available due to budget limitations, time or the size of the class.	using the best resources available. The only constraints refer to family budget and the access to these resources.
<b>EVALUATION</b>	Evaluation should be regarded by the children as a means of analysing their activity, as a stage towards self-assessment, and not as a constraint.	The evaluation is restricted to assessment methods of the students' progress through written or oral tests. Self-assessment is encouraged only to a small extent.	The children's development and progress are assessed empirically and subjectively.
<b>CONTROL</b>	The teacher must be able to permanently control a class made of 20 to 30 students; he must promote a communion of love and respect between the students, but also in the teacher-students relationship.	The teacher must be able to permanently control a class made of 20 to 30 students. In view of ensuring a positive evolution of the didactic act, the teacher must constantly apply disciplinary methods suitable to each situation.	Control is a natural part of the parent-child relationship.
<b>TIME</b>	The time spent with the children is not limited to class activities. The children take part in the religious service held at the church, or in various religious, social, philanthropic events in the life of the community. These are auspicious moments which valorise the children's religious education.	The time spent with the children is limited to the class activity. Only the students who create trouble get special attention. The teacher is unable to adapt the teaching rhythm to the learning rhythm of each student.	Unlimited time spent with the children, in a wide variety of learning situations. Children get individualized attention.

### 3. Discussions

Regardless of the environment in which it takes place, education is a life social phenomenon. It is beyond doubts that the principle of any educational programme is to establish a dual harmony between social exigencies and the child's possibilities, between individual experience and social ideals that are not separated from morals.

Philosophy debates a number of question related to human knowledge, divine determinism and free will, develops theories concerning the relation between good and evil, the connexion between equity and justice, and many others. All of these issues may be correlated with the religious education, which, to some extent, may provide answers or may enlighten the human mind.

Interdisciplinarity comes to support the complementarity and integration of human knowledge. Non-specific information, pertaining to other disciplines, may be valorised through religion, and may also support theological arguments. The problem of religion is to correlate the contents and objectives in a way which does not offend the religious beliefs of people of other denomination.

A teacher who resorts to teaching religion interdisciplinary, referring to the principles of more denominations at once, may acquire positive effects in many respects:

- towards reducing tension and conflict factors in the social environment;
- towards the elimination of the preconceived ideas, myths, and interethnic and inter-confessional disputes, by learning mutual knowledge;
- towards the debunking of ethnic and confessional stereotypes through direct, unmediated contact with the specificities of the other;
- towards the consolidation of culture of the human rights, etc.

#### 4. Conclusions

Religious education has always been a part of the educational systems of the civilised, Christian peoples, which is easy to explain through the human being's need for transcendence. The existence of the sacred depends on human nature – “to live as a human nature”, Mircea Eliade remarked, “is a religious act in itself... the conscience of real and significant world is intimately related to the discovery of the sacred” (Eliade, M.,1990)

We present below some rules recommended for a genuine religious education:

Students may be educated in Christian spirit, regardless of their social origins and genetic factors.

Students are able to experience Christian emotions and feelings, regardless of the results acquired in the initial tests.

Any student is able to convert to Christianity and to embrace Christian morals, regardless of his behavior.

Teachers may decrease the level of subjectivity in the assessment of the affective-moral objectives.

Teachers must be constantly trained, not only in their field, but especially in psycho-pedagogy and didactics.

Parents must educate their children in religion spirit, which ensure one's identity and values.

Religion is an important form of spirituality. The knowledge of the religious values is a cultural exigency which determines one's placement in a cultural space. Christian faith and religious education have been, along the entire history of Romania, a coagulant factor of social and cultural continuity.

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