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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

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Abstract

At the beginning of the third millennium the human society came with a new and complex challenges: secularisation and globalization which involves new sets of national values which are compared with secular values with which society has become accustomed and now go beyond national borders. Living in the new global village, a Europe in which borders seem to disappear, where EU laws become rules to be followed for Member States, the EU values extended throughout the whole continent. Globalization can be considered a phenomenon which goes beyond the opening of local and nationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers, bringing touch in to different fields: social, moral, religious, scientific, and political and this is not an easy process. The globalisation is process is highly complex, dynamic and continuous. The educational process achieved in national contexts, but with a real openness to the world, to the values and challenges from beyond the national culture, education itself is a process with globalizations trends are seen. Education is the social phenomenon complex that involves two categories of actors: educators and learners. The educational process ensures values' transfer from an old generation to a new one, In this regard, we must be aware that both educators and pupils change from one generation to another, from this point of view the educational process, the curriculum, the pupils' needs and the teaching methods of teachers are in constant change.

Keywords: Education, religion education, globalization, secularization.

1. Introduction

We live in an era of globalisation - there can be no going back on it. Countries have little choice whether to globalise or not. Globalisation is a rapidly ongoing phenomenon that generates a constant debate on its negative aspects.

The phenomenon of globalisation has become possible primarily because of the advances that have taken place in science and technology, resulting in major disruptive technologies across a range of areas. The invention of the jet engine and a series of innovations that have brought about major changes in the scale of transportation modes has led to the ability to move people and goods using wide-bodied jet aircraft, giant ocean-going vessels, containerised transport and pipeline systems (Govind & Menon, 2006).

The concept of globalisation involves the process of scaling from a national situation to a global situation, the religious situation of Western Europe is a particular one, the West affirms the secularization of modern societies, here the Church has disappeared from the public scene, the ties between the Church and the State have been broken, the religious practices have diminished.

2. Problem Statement

The term *secularization* has been interpreted differently over time, it being granted different meanings. The etymology of the term *secularization* comes from Latin. The root of the word *saeculum* means either *forever*, *a long time*, or *this world as opposed to the world of God*.

Numerous definitions of secularization have been formulated in the course of history, of which Emile Durkheim's is closer to the perception of the term as we understand it today: a decline of religion, "the loss of power by the church, the separation of the state, the passage of religious groups into autonomous groups, the inability of religious institutions to apply their rules on civil institutions and, more generally, the loss of control over the lives of individuals, the distancing of intellectuals from the church, the inability of the church to produce an intellectual elite" (Hervieu-Léger, 1993).

According to the dictionary of sociology, secularization is a "process characteristic of the modern age, consisting in the tendency to diminish the role of religion in social life," (Bulai, 1993) a mass phenomenon involving an intellectual process (Chadwick, 1990), which, according to E. Norman does not necessarily represent a spiritual or religious decline, but rather a moment of "transformation of the religious perceptions of the people. Perhaps people are less loyal to religious institutions, but that does not necessarily mean they are less religious (Norman, 2002), this is also due to existing trends in the upgrading of religious practices to the expectations of today's people (Bellah, 1964).

Because of the diminishing of its role as the main institution of the state, in a secularised society religion loses its ability to control or influence the political, economic, administrative, social life in general (Mandache, 1999).

Under these circumstances, "the Church cannot be content to be a voluntary society concerned only with private and domestic problems. It has the call to launch, on behalf of the Almighty Lord, a challenge to ideologies, myths, assumptions, and perspectives that do not recognize Him as God. If this involves entering a conflict, some difficulty, or if it involves rejection, then we have the example of the Lord Jesus before us as a reminder that a servant is not above his master" (Newbigin, 1989). Christ the Saviour being Himself provoked, denied, rejected,

therefore no one confesses that the mission of the Church will be easy, but rather challenging, with which it will manage to cope, since, according to the Apostle Paul: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (The Bible…, 2008).

3. Research Questions

How important is religious education in school? How does the phenomenon of secularization affect religious education? Which may be the role of the church in the religious education of children? How secularized is the Romanian society?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to present the opportunity of religious education in schools in Romania, given that mankind in its emergence needs the values set by Christianity in the course of two thousand years. After fifty years of communism and alienation from the teachings of Christ, Romania discovers its profoundly Christian and apostolic roots, but this was not easy at all. Political, economic, social troubles have made this road of self-recognition more difficult, more difficult. Romanian legislation has changed quite often, after the accession to the European Union, the legislation had to be harmonized with the community, the Romanian realities changed quite quickly. in this context, I wanted to find out what is the place of religious education in Romania's recent history and to see what role this will have in the future of the Romanian school.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on a theoretical framework and the analysis was founded on qualitative methodological research using analysis of theological and legislative documents (the biblical ground and legislation on religious education in Romania since December 1989). This approach was the most appropriate way to address the research objectives, and to underlined the importance of the research issues.

6. Findings

In Romania, the study of religion in schools is governed by the Constitution of the State; Article 32, paragraph 7 provides as follows: "The state ensures the freedom of religious education, according to the specific requirements of each cult. In state schools, religious education is organized and guaranteed by law," (*Official Gazette of Romania, no.* 765, 2003) the study of religion is a compulsory subject for pupils, but the law provides for the possibility of a waiver if the family or the child decides not to attend, and there is no legal norm on the age at which a child can decide for himself/herself (Cuciureanu & Velea, 2008).

In an acknowledged secularized society, religion is present in the public education system in the Member States of the European Union in a more or less confessional form, compulsory or optional, but Religion is studied in the schools from all the states of the European Union.

The subject of Religion is not imposed by the State, but by virtue of the religious freedom recognized in all the Member States of the European Union in their very Constitution, in Article 10, paragraph (1) the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides as follows: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought,

conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance" (Official Journal of the European Union*,* 83/389, 2010).

Jesus Christ, the Saviour, the Son of God incarnate, carried on the earth a threefold activity: one of ruling, as an Emperor, one of sanctification, as an Archbishop, and one of teaching, as a Teacher! Those around Him called Him *teacher*. The teachings offered to the people by Jesus could not be equalled by any speaker, a fact acknowledged by His adversaries: "Never has anyone spoken like this man!" (Holy Scripture, Gospel of John 7:46, 2008).

The Church's educational activity was instituted by Christ Himself, when He gave His Apostles a mandate, stating "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (The Bible or Holy Scripture, Gospel of Matthew 28: 19-20, 2008), so that men may know His will and accomplish it. The finality of Christian education must be seen only in relation to the model offered by Christ the Saviour; "Christians must be trained according to His example, illuminated in spirit, saints in diligence of conscience and strong in deeds (each according to his vocation)" (Comenius, 1970), because the purpose of the educational process is knowledge: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (The Bible or Holy Scripture, Gospel of John 17:3, 2008), the end is not an idea, but a person to whom we relate our whole life, and the whole of life is a long process of knowledge and discovery.

The Church is the "community extension of Christ, or the body of those assembled in Christ, and they constitute His mysterious body, and Christ is the everlasting and active Head of this Body, never separated from the flesh" (Todoran, 1991).

That is why the Church has to get involved in the life of the community in all its aspects, it cannot look from the outside at what happens to the world, to itself.

One of the new post-December religious realities was the introduction of religion into secular schools, religious education being one of the substantive issues of society as a whole and, at the same time, educational policy. Immediately after the Revolution of 1989, the Romanian Orthodox Church insisted on the introduction of Religion classes in the school curriculum starting from the 1990-1991 school year, based on some normative documents of the Ministry of Education, so that religion in school could be legally enacted by Law no. 84/1995 on Education, Article 9 (Lemeni & Dedu, 2006), as subsequently amended several times (December 8, 1991; August 17, 1993; July 24, 1995; July 10, 1997; July 30, 1999; April 11, 2001; January 8, 2007; December 17, 2007; March 16, 2009; April 30, 2009; September 15, 2009; May 19, 2010).

The reintroduction of the subject of Religion into state education was not an innovative act at the time, but rather a return to normality (Gordon, 2003), today religion has gained a place in the education system (Moşin, 2013).

The three institutions of childhood: family, school and society intersect, influence and complement one another. Children take everything and imitate everything (Tănăsescu-Vlas, 2009), and the environment in which they live determines many of the values they share.

That is why a harmonious co-operation between these structures is in the benefit of both the child and society. The church, unlike the little family at home, is the great family, which has an educational and religious

impact on its believers, and through the educational approach of religion classes it helps society as a whole, promoting love, friendship, peace, understanding, helping and co-operation among peers, detention from committing *evil* (Salade, 1998).

The purpose of the class of Religion is not the catechesis offered by the Church to the faithful, nor the religious information or the mere improvement of the students' character, these being objectives inferior to the purpose of the Christian-Orthodox teaching, but rather the revelation or discovery of Christ in the concrete space to which it is addressed.

Religion as the free, conscious and personal connection of the human being with God, founded on love and freedom and manifested through various forms of honour, privately and publicly, presents itself as "a human and divine creation at the same time [...] is the spiritual chip itself of general existence" (Opriş, 2009).

Because each person relates to reality in a pragmatic way, through will and deed, but also at the spiritual level, through faith, attitude, an educational system cannot reach its fullness when it marginalizes or omits one of its fundamental components. An integral education therefore encompasses, besides the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and technological sides, a religious component as well. The relationship between these and the way each contributes to the achievement of the educational ideal, aims and objectives in a certain social system is specified by legal norms, according to the particularities and directions of development that a society proposes in a certain historical age (Opriş, 2009).

Religious education is not only a religious, social and cultural approach, but also a path to the formation of correct and thorough representations of national and universal culture, the stimulation of intercultural dialogue from the perspective of freedom and equality among peers, actions that the Christian religion proposes in the highest sense, education in the spirit of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, dignity, tolerance, cultivation of sensitivity to human issues, moral-civic values, respect for the arts, respect for nature and the environment, which are in fact the final purposes of the Law on Education and are to be found under different formulations in the drafts of the education law debated in recent years.

Religious education is defined as a dimension of education that consciously develops the predisposition towards religiosity, which is innate and characteristic of the human being, on the basis of teaching principles and with the help of specific means and methods (Opriş, 2009).

7. Conclusion

Though not entirely false, the assumption that we live in a secularized world is somewhat relative, because the world of today is equally affiliated with religion as it has always been, and in some places even more than that. Secularization is a historical fact that cannot be denied and a very complex process, although its interpretation depends essentially on our theological position.

The Church and the State are currently supporting each other and collaborating in a particularly fortunate way with regard to social work activities. All this proves that these days we cannot speak of absolute secularization, of a total separation of the Church from the State. We can instead speak of transforming the relationship between these two entities by affirming an autonomous character of each of them, which does not place them in a situation of mutual rejection.

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