

Religious Education in the Context of Interculturality

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to highlight the significance of religious education in shaping the character and personality of young individuals. It emphasizes the need to make religious education relevant in the contemporary world, whether or not the country has a denominational religious education system. Educational models must be suitable for all pupils, as society is becoming more diverse and the world more globalized. Religion is about beliefs and behaviors, not just the school teaching of a subject. Educating also involves the spiritual formation of children, which takes place in public schools, but also within the family or in local churches. The communities in which we live must be inclusive and learning must be based on Christian values and the promotion of healthy behavior. By incorporating these values into everyday life, we can have strong communities where people live in harmony with each other, regardless of their differences.

KEYWORDS: God, education, religion, education religious, schools, society

Introduction

Religious education is an important part of a person's life, regardless of their cultural or religious background. In this type of education, the main moral and ethical values of people are cultivated and developed, which, started early, lead to harmonious growth, both in the private life of young people and in social life. In the context of today's multicultural society, religious education can be the basis for acceptance and understanding of those who come from outside one's own area of knowledge. The perspective of the common good can be achieved through communion, and communion can be reached through religious education.

Definition of terms and concepts

We live in a multicultural world that is increasingly diverse and constantly changing. In order to live together harmoniously in such a world, each of us must have the common good in mind, and this can be achieved through education. But what is education? How can we understand this process?

What is education?

In the vocabulary of the Romanian language, we find the term "education", which comes from the Latin "educare", "educare", meaning to nourish, to raise, to care for; and "educere", "educere" which means to lead, to lead, to take (an individual or a being out of one state and into another) (Carcea 2001, 18). Discovering the origin of this concept, we can state that "education" means "a fundamental social phenomenon of transmitting the life experience of generations of adults and culture to generations of children and young people, the knowledge of good manners and behavior in society according to them" (DEX 2009). The psychologist Tinca Crețu defines education as: "the set of actions and activities that integrate the subject as an active factor and that is carried out systematically, in a unified, organized manner, with a content, with a definitive need for society, aimed at the appropriate methods, procedures and means and being conducted by competent, specially qualified factors" (Crețu 2009, 30). Therefore, education is a complex process of training that takes place throughout the individual's life and creates opportunities for a better future. In addition to career development prospects, education is also about opportunities for better physical and mental health and the acquisition of moral and ethical values.

Religious and moral education

In order to discuss religious education, it is necessary to define religion. Philosopher John Wilson believes that religious education fails because the term 'religion' and the way it has been defined previously have not represented a clear idea of what 'religion' really means. Thus, it is not possible to quantify what religious education would mean in terms of success. The same philosopher, criticizes earlier tendencies to frame religion in a sui generis category (Thompson 2004, 87). We can assume, therefore, that earlier definitions have refused to adequately present what a form of religious knowledge can represent. In this way, Christianity cannot be placed alongside other religions precisely because of the burden of knowledge.

So we need to insist on understanding the meaning and significance of the term "religion". What is meant by religion? The term "religion", as described in the book *Methodology of Religious Education*, is that "free, conscious and personal relationship of man with God. The existence of religion is dependent on the question of the existence and knowledge of God". It is with religion that man is born, it is that inner longing for divinity which, when cultivated, is externalized through religious sentiment, materializing in a moral attitude, rituals, ceremonies and religious practices (Şebu 2000, 19). When we say religious education, we mean "religious cultivation or growth in a particular religious or faith tradition". The concept is also used of "education about religions, taught in such a way as to provide young people with accurate information, taught with sensitivity and some understanding of religious language" (Jackson 2019, 238).

Moral education is part of the philosophy of education. In the past, the concept of morality or goodness was associated with religious belief and practice. Whereas, in the modern era, attempts are being made to separate moral education from religious education (Chazan 2022, 23). With secularization, people's trust in the institution of the church has declined considerably. Therefore, moral crisis is one of the problems of the contemporary world. Sin is increasingly present, man has become corrupt, and the effects of sin lead to moral and spiritual depravity. Also, in Scripture, we find the saving solution to the problem of sin, which is Jesus, who gave His own life on the cross so that we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Moral education is essential to acquire healthy principles of life. There are absolute principles, but others are relative, depending on personal beliefs, culture and different circumstances. The Bible promotes virtues and moral attitudes in various texts that guide us towards love, compassion, forgiveness, integrity, and kindness. For example, the text in Matthew 7:12, also called the rule of the Bible, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for in this are the law and the prophets," is also mentioned in other sacred writings of other religions (Miller 2019) and is a norm of conduct. Other biblical texts that promote biblical principles are "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8), such as "Seek to present yourself before God as one who has been tried, as a worker who has nothing to be ashamed of and who rightly divides the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Of course, this category includes others.

An effective religious education begins in the family by transmitting and teaching Christian principles (Rotaru 2011, 5), continues in places of worship and schools, and continues throughout a person's life. Education is a complex activity aimed at the formation and development of the personality, involving the accumulation of values which shape the character of the individual. This process of socialization involves the acquisition, application and transmission of these values. Education plays an important role in the well-being of society, and its importance can be seen at any time and in any area of human life (Priala 2023, 252). Education itself is vital to human life. Through education, the being is taken from a lower state and led to a higher one, so that the individual can adapt to existing social

conditions. It is a process that begins with early education and reaches up to higher education. Religious instruction is concerned with moral and religious education, and this must begin at an early age. It covers aspects of everyday life, but also the depth of eternal life. Man is created from both the material (body) and the soul (emotional and mental) as well as the spiritual (spirit) side (Rotaru 2005a, 187-206). The spirit helps us to interact with God, and through a Christian education we can get to know God.

True education is more than studying certain subjects or systematically following a curriculum from a syllabus. It means more than a preparation for professional life, it has to do with the whole being and the whole possible period of human existence. It prepares the child to become useful to society, but at the same time it aims at eternity, at the mysteries of the salvation of the soul, which is, in fact, the ideal of the Christian (Rotaru 2021a, 87).

Religious education is about more than learning about the world's religions. In some countries, such as England and Wales, "religious education" usually refers to "the subject matter taught in state-funded community schools" (Jackson 2007, 5). The content of religious education is determined by the type of school and the existing curriculum. There are also special schools of a religious nature called Christian faith schools, most of which are linked to local churches.

The importance of religious education

Quality education is necessary for the progress of contemporary society. A quality education is one that seeks to promote the common good. Inclusive education is about integrating all children and ensuring that no one is excluded, neither children with disabilities nor those from less developed areas. The right to education is fundamental. Early childhood education plays a very important role in this. In terms of the common good, this concept concerns all members of a community and the rights and freedoms without which there can be no progress and development. Through education, we pass on the basic values we received from our parents and we owe it to our children to pass them on.

Qualitative religious education and human freedom

Man is born with a need for divinity, a need to believe in a higher power. From the beginning of human history, man had fellowship with God in Eden. If we look at the religions that have existed and that exist in the world today, we see that every religion represents a search for divinity (Rotaru 2023, 62-79).

The common good, a normative ideal. Knowing your neighbor

The world around us is changing so rapidly and it is vital that each of us contributes to the society in which we live, using our God-given potential. Many people perceive theology as something that only belongs to the church and its schools, and argue that it should only be practiced in their private space. Traci (1984, 233). states that "theology should play a role in the public space because it helps all of us ask the kinds of questions that all rational people ask." Theology must express its beliefs in public life in order to contribute effectively to the educational process. Often, the model promoted in the public sphere is totally different from that proposed by Christianity, with Christian values being increasingly marginalized in society, while secularization (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) is taking over all sectors and areas of life.

Benefits of religious education/ consequences of not having religious education

Religious practice involves acting according to beliefs and values that should be for the common good. Effective education seeks both its own good and the common good of society, so that living the life of faith influences society as a whole. The concept of education itself

has several benefits. Through reading, the individual enriches his vocabulary (Rotaru 2021a, 92), develops his general culture and is spiritually enriched. Also, education makes you think (Rotaru 2021a, 89), it is the path to knowledge and it helps you develop emotionally and cognitively. With every book a person opens, they actually open a new world (Rotaru 2021a, 92). Former South African President Nelson Mandela stated that "education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world" (Rotaru 2021b, 191).

Physical health education

It is essential to note that the main questions, the answers to which are provided by religious education, originate in the natural aspects of human life, such as human vulnerability to pain, guilt, death, the limits of human power in the face of nature, etc. However, it is also important to note that the answers to these questions may be speculative or controversial, and the task of religious education is to compare one set of answers with another. The critical impulse must come from the human spirit, and this must be enhanced by religious education, which in turn can raise new questions. In other words, the impulse for critical inquiry, arising directly from faith, is not perceived as being against faith or as coming from outside faith, but, precisely, as a product of faith (Editorial 1980, 42).

This view is of particular importance not only in understanding the role of religious education in the search for meaning in the lives of individuals, but also in understanding the kind of relationship between the faith of a religious education teacher and his or her work as an educator of a mass of young people (Editorial 1980, 43).

Teamwork is very important in the training of the child. This process is necessary later in adult life in order to develop communication and collaboration skills with other individuals. Games and activities can be helpful in the inclusion process as they develop qualities such as empathy, compassion and listening. And in the Bible we have examples of teamwork (Nehemiah 4:15-23, Ephesians 4:15-16, Mark 6:7-13), so this skill is essential for growing in faith and learning to serve as Jesus taught us.

Emotional and psychological development

Derek Webster discusses the search for meaning in life as a fundamental need of the individual. Given this, religious education has assumed the role of a liberal education, grounded in the child, with humanitarian values, but in no way dependent on the particular claims of religion. In this way, religious education no longer had the role merely of stimulating faith, but of supporting the child in his or her everyday development (Editorial 1980, 41). This new approach had important consequences in a regular religious education course, namely that in the primary and secondary school cycle, it succeeded in linking everyday and secular life by providing thematic teaching. In this light, religion can be seen as an interpretation of life; an idea complemented by the fact that in the secondary cycle of education, a wide range of social and personal issues were introduced into the discourse of religious education (Editorial 1980, 41).

H. B. Atkuis argued that the teacher must have beliefs that are attested by significant historical events and that give rise to a view of life that has stood the test of time. The teacher must impart to children clear religious convictions that children can accept or reject as appropriate. This idea is grounded in the function of education to develop the ability to discern between good-bad, true-false (Thompson 2004, 88).

However, the importance of religious education cannot be disputed. It is primarily about promoting fundamental values of life among young pupils through this type of education. In the same vein, early religious education helps to create meaning in personal life. Much of contemporary humanistic psychology and psychotherapy emphasizes the need for a vision of life in which life has both purpose and meaning. The creation of meaning is one of the main goals of religious education (Editorial 1980, 41).

Revelation and inspiration through Scripture

In the context of the world we live in, society faces critical global problems and shortcomings in all areas. We are all concerned about the welfare of our children because they are the present and the future of society. In order to protect our children, we need to familiarise ourselves with a new concept called public theology or theology in the public space, as Duncan B. Forrester in *The Scope of Public Theology*. This theology seeks the good of society over "the interests of the Church or its freedom to proclaim the Gospel and celebrate its sacraments" (Forrester 2004, 6). It offers different, constructive points of view, inspired by revelation received from God, which can only be gained through consistent study of the Scriptures. Once accepted, this concept becomes useful in shaping today's society by diminishing deviations from social norms and promoting a moral-Christian lifestyle (Forrester 2004, 15). Therefore, in the Christian context, there is a need for religious education in which theology regains its assigned place among people and in people's lives (Barbu 2016, 26).

Biblical theology is the queen of science. If biology is the science of life, Jesus Christ is life (John 14:6). If geography is the science of the earth, Jesus Christ is the Creator of the ends of the earth (Isaiah 40:28). If hydrology is the science of water, from Jesus Christ springs the water of life (Revelation 22:1). That theology is the queen of science, it is the study of God, whereby the one who studies it not only discovers about God, but discovers God personally (Morris 2002, 17). The word "philosophy" means "the pursuit of wisdom" (Rotaru 2005b, 25-29) and we find writings on wisdom in the ancient Greek philosophers. The Jews also placed great emphasis on wisdom: 'Then you will understand righteousness, judgment, unbiasedness, all the ways that lead to good.' For wisdom shall come into your heart, and knowledge shall be the delight of your soul; understanding shall watch over you, understanding shall guard you" (Proverbs 2:9-11). Therefore, if a man constantly refers to biblical principles, he gains wisdom, shows moral behavior and has better relationships with those around him. Folly is the opposite of wisdom and can be avoided by knowing Christ and understanding Scripture.

The contribution of religions to the common good in a pluralistic society

The paradigm of the world's great religions involves several elements, such as: creed, cult, code, community, conscience and culture. Some religions place particular emphasis on one or other of these elements, although they generally do not exclude the others. The Islamic religion, for example, is centred on the Qur'an and the teachings of Mohammed and is about community. Hindu religion focuses on the practice of worship, belief in Brahman (the Supreme Self), Buddhist religion on consciousness (vijñāna), and in Confucian religion the emphasis is on culture - Chinese culture (McCann 2009, 917).

Intercultural education

If we look more closely at the religions mentioned above, we can identify different levels of religious education. For beginners, there is initial or catechetical teaching, which then continues with advanced training in the form of seminaries or theological schools (McCann 2009, 934). During secularisation, in several countries around the world, attempts were made to separate church and state. Despite this process of secularization, after the events of September 11, 2001, which occurred in New York City and Washington, D.C., American society sought to incorporate some form of religious studies into the curricula of public schools. In this way, young Americans can receive a religious education at least on an informational and cultural level (Jackson 2010, 1).

In the eighth decade of the last century, the same Derek Webster mentioned above, spoke precisely of a crisis within religious education whether denominational or non-denominational, given that there is a tendency to dismiss both, without any prior analysis of how, within these educational types, it relates to authority, indoctrination and/or commitment.

The aforementioned knowledge burden could not be conveyed in the most concrete way if there were no operational objectives, evaluation modalities or research methodology; all based on the actual situation. Geraint Jones, throughout his career, noted the inadequacy that many teachers felt in their work because the suggestions of what he called 'subject or syllabus developers' were not having the desired effect, not taking into account the contemporary situation (Thompson 2004, 87).

Alongside the humanistic psychology mentioned above, the search for meaning in life has incorporated the study of world religions. The main reason being that they can be seen as a set of answers to questions we consider fundamental (Editorial 1980, 41). However, one cannot claim for religious education something that should be the task of the entire school curriculum. Thus, although essential to the search for meaning in young people's lives, religious education cannot be attributed the role of being the sole agent for creating this meaning, and would thus be subject to intolerable tensions. Religious education is not intended to be exhaustive. It is categorically necessary that the answers to the questions offered by religion be balanced or even supplemented by answers offered by the sciences, arts or humanities (Editorial 1980, 41).

Educational and social policies (Education for the common good)

Education is a lifelong process, which requires continuous learning as our society is constantly changing. We need to be open to learn constantly. Technology has developed a lot in the last 20 years. Today we have internet-connected devices, fast access to information, innovative products and services to make our lives easier. Distance is no longer an issue, students can access courses online. However, technology must be a beneficial tool for the believer, not an impediment to developing a relationship with God.

In Proverbs 19:8 we find it written: "He who gains wisdom loves his soul; he who retains understanding finds happiness." God's Word teaches us, counsels us and guides us in the right way. The need for validation begins in childhood. We seek to be valued and accepted by others and often have a distorted perception of our own worth. Our value is given to us by Christ, He loves us unconditionally, by faith we are children of God. Our value is not given to us by others' opinions of us, but by God's love for us which is eternal. The calling He gives us gives us the freedom (Rotaru 2017, 545-550) to become bearers of Christ's image in the world. The social responsibility of the Christian in the public space must be seen through personal or even family actions in social, political, economic issues, based on a Christian ethic of promoting religious values. The types of public theology must be approached in an appropriate way. Our contribution to the progress of society is due to the way we "take seriously the different types of public theology highlighted in the literature and dedicated to it - the interpretive, the historical, as well as the descriptive, the methodological and the constructivist - which together address crucial issues and specific concerns of importance in the field of study". Lest we become accustomed to an unimportant section and learn more and more from authentic public theology (Breitenberg 2003, 96).

Conclusion

The importance of religious education is undeniable, especially in the current context. The world is constantly changing and we need to adapt to these changes as they happen. It is essential to look at things from a religious perspective so that we can more easily integrate the different cultures that intersect with our particular lives more and more often. Education for the common good (Bâlc 2018, 110-115) becomes the equivalent of religious education, especially as it complements the whole school curriculum. Starting early in life, religious education equips future citizens to embrace diversity more readily. It helps them develop a broader perspective, fostering acceptance and tolerance.

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