

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNION IN ORTHODOXY

- A PRACTICAL, ASCERTAINING AND IMPACT STUDY-

DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

Work made under the guidance

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INTRODUCTION

Man is not an individual who lives on Earth separated from his fellows. Man becomes a person only when connected to the other people and preserves himself for Eternity by doing good things for those close to him. Since early childhood Man feels this divine message in his soul, known as natural moral law, and since beginning to show self-awareness and understanding of the world around, at the age of 6 or 7, he starts looking for the discovery of his own inner universe with which he heads for Eternity.

Education, as a typical human activity, intervention or re-orientation of personal development of man, is the fundamental section of pedagogy, the essence of the evolution of a community, achieved through imperative inter-human relationships. We often hear opinions about a man's education or lack of education, based on his social behaviour. And we often hear opinions regarding the family who educated him or his seven basic years. And we also hear remarks concerning what he is learning or learnt at school. It is easy to notice that the majority of the society accept the fact that the most important and, implicitly, the most relevant factors of the personal development of man are connected to education achieved through co-operation and interrelation between the actors of the school and the family and community members.

The institutional training depends on the system, that is the family system, the educational system and the social system. In this way the community is provided with that set of formal and informal rules which generate order in the social relationships. We can say that in everyday life the institutional rules are „the rules of the game”, or those limitations and restrictions established by people to give shape to the human interaction within their social action.

The beginning of the school life, as integration in the institutional system of the child, is his personal approach to the theoretical knowledge of the doctrine of faith taught in school and, while learning mathematics, language, science, home economics, art, he shows to the others the religious practice of the 7 *basic years*. On these grounds the teacher of Religion starts to build hundreds of inner universes which show God's image as well as means of exploring the personal resources meant to ensure the way to the Eternity of the resemblance with God.

How easy, beautiful, responsible can such a mission be? A teacher cannot answer by himself, but he understands it from the light of the children's eyes, which he will keep in his soul forever, as he becomes responsible for them in eternity.

How can a teacher of Religion order the young inner universes, which are in full shaping and rising, on the road between face and resemblance, but always at the crossroads between universal priesthood and sacramental priesthood, as everybody must keep in mind St. Paul's questions: „*May all of them be apostles? May all of them be prophets?*” (I Corinteni 12,29)?

Out of my own experience acquired while training in public administration, orthodox theology, social assistance, culture and civilisation, teaching religion, psychology, and out of my expertise in Christian pedagogy practise, as well as in school management and religious voluntary work, I have understood, in a highly customized environment, while observing, between 2009 and 2014, my pupils' interest in learning Religion in school and in living in communion with God and His Church, that „the Romanian Orthodoxy today has got a new profile, but its complex joints are not known. The positive statistics regarding the Romanian Orthodoxy do not reveal its qualities, its influence on the actual existence of the believers, on the social cohesion of the people, on the political direction of the country. What are the roots of this situation?

We are trying to answer this question through this study, analysing the historical evolution of the manifestation of the recent orthodox spirituality, the values and the way they are valued as well as the social, economic and cultural context Romania has headed for lately.

This study is not intended to change in the short-term the Romanians' view regarding the communion between God and man, or to implement strategies of personal communion with my fellows and with God. After studying attentively and analysing carefully documents in libraries, churches and monasteries and confessions but mostly personal experience, this study is intended to be a means of identification of programmatic factors present in the personality of our community today, factors which are essential for the valorisation or the non-valorisation of religion, dictated by the attitude of the young generation.

The hypothesis which is the base of this study is the fruit of my personal reflection and acquisition, as a teacher of religion, of the value of the existence of a profound and solid relationship between theory and practice.

The thesis as a whole is intended to bring to attention the importance the contemporary society gives the Church teaching about the communion between God and man, through an accessible structure of the paper, an introduction and four chapters structured in two parts. The Introduction presents the justification of the theme, then Chapter One gives the definition of the concepts and their shaping following the doctrine of faith and the elements essential to the restauration of man, preparing him for the communion with God. The chapter synthesizes the theoretical aspects of the educational system and the teaching of religion as an integral part of it. Chapter Two describe the Father Staniloae's *contribution to the definition of the notion of individual and communion*. An exceptional personality in theology, at national and universal level, Pr. Prof. Dr. Acad. Dumitru Staniloae, through the theology written and experienced by himself, has convinced and still convinces through the depth, richness and

clarity of his work, not only theologians but also people from various professional categories, intellectual and ordinary ones alike.

Chapter Three deals with the practical study of the spirituality of the Romanian people regarding the religious values, the person and communion , from the point of view of the pupil who studies religion at secondary school . Chapter Four describes my personal conclusions on the action perspectives of those programmatic factors of the personality of our community today , essential for the valorisation or non-valorisation of religion, dictated by the attitude of the young generation , taking into account the truth that the entire life is a process of initiation for death and communion. Because death opens, while offering redemption, the road of infinite progress, of human accomplishment perceived as advance towards the embodiment of the prototype.

PART 1 – THEORETICAL APPROACH

CHAPTER I

Man as a personal spiritual being

In this aware and voluntary relationship between our being and God, since our soul is related to God, lies God's embodiment within man. Man resembles God and because of this kinship with God, man reaches to God or he maintains an active relationship with God. And through this relationship man maintains the kinship to God. Even a biological image maintains the kinship to its model but only if a continuous power emerges from the model or if there is a continuous communion between the two.

Man resembles to God only if, based on this kinship, the relationship between them is alive like a continuous communion, in which both man and God are active. So human beings are similar to God through this relationship which is possible because God created man in a strong relationship to Him from the very beginning. Better yet, He created man in a free and conscious relationship with Him by granting man free spirit.

We, as human beings, are related to God through spirit and we are capable of receiving it precisely because we are worthy and because we have a conscious relationship with God.

Man has been rewarded by his creation which resembles to God, resemblance which brought about the kinship with God himself. But this quality survives and evolves through a continuous relationship with God of which man is capable and which his soul demands. The godly resemblance is both a 'gift' and a 'mission'.

As a human, man looks up to his model which is God. Without his connection to God, man can't reason. Reaching out for the absolute is in his nature. Man has deep roots in the absolute. Man

reaches out to God, as God is absolute, and he also reaches out to the absolute, as the absolute is his personal God.

The human image represents his road to deification, his thirst for the infinite, as a bilateral relationship. The resemblance is not only the final state of deification, but the whole journey of developing the human image, with the help of the human will, stimulated and helped by God's good grace.

Man, by receiving the image of the Holy Trinity (Genesis 1, 26-27), he also gets honour and wisdom (Psalm 20, 3-4) and becomes 'friends' with God, in heaven, close to the tree of life (Genesis 2, 8-9).

'From God's point of view, man has a unique and superior purpose in this world and a supernatural destiny. Man is created by God for God himself. God has created the world for mankind, to be offered as a gift for God. Man's vocation is to rule the world and to worship God (Genesis 2, 6) in close connection with Him. Human tragedy comes from man's desire to singularise himself through a conscious process. But man is not a solitary entity and he continues to function as a being only in close communion with another being. Nobody becomes a being on his own.'¹

Regardless the implications of being a PERSON, may it be a member of the community, an institution with physical or juridical connections, a grammatical notion which extends to the communion between two people, a person or thing, the term implies a minimal communication, the willingness of a person to connect. The growth and evolution of it lie in that person's potential which can eventually develop into a communion.

The communion is not static, it evolves and expands, and it's a process of assimilation and mutual giving, a vital relationship of mutual fulfilment. It fuels you continuously from God's

kingdom. ‘Is it not the blessing cup which we bless a communion with Christ’s blood? Is it not the bread we share a communion with Christ’s body?’ (I Cor. X, 16). Saint Pavel allows us to understand that the Christians’ communion is based on a shared involvement into Christ’s life through sharing His blood and body. The Christians from Corinth shared the belief that Christ dwelled among them and that they were parts of the same body – the Church, whose leader was Christ.

‘The dialogue and only the most absolute dialogue must be done through praying...’

For the orthodox spirituality, the happiness of the heavenly kingdom is above all the joint participation to the Holy Trinity, the joint legacy of the divine, the possibility of inheriting the grace of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is the basic concept of the religious thinking, of the absolute devoutness and of the spiritual life.

The Romanian educational system, the framework for personal moral and social development with the help of Religious studies as a school subject

For an efficient and relevant presentation of the educational policies within the current educational framework and of the teaching of Religious studies, it’s mandatory to structure this chapter according to an index, a main resource in identifying the development of the educational policies after the revolution from December 1989 up to present days, but not before we present quickly the evolution of the Romanian school.

Thus, using the key concepts in order to support the reflection upon the mandatory character of the existence and application of the educational policies within the Romanian educational system; the framework: the dimensions and the legal framework of the schooling system, including

aspects which are specific to religious education; materials: the indicators and questions used to identify and implement the priorities for the change; the inclusion process: through which the participants plan the changes and apply the plans, it is obvious that the key concepts of the index of this chapter are 'reform' and 'change'.

The goals of the education are established according to the results of the conducted studies of the necessities and educational potential of the Romanian society and they are determined by law.

Over the twenty years which have passed since the revolution from December 1989 the educational system has been regulated by fundamental, organisational, specialised laws, governmental decisions and subsequent decrees.

The Religious studies as a school subject has been taught in the state schools after 1989, until 2011 according to the Education Law no. 84/1995, republished, section 9, subsection 1: 'The school framework for primary, secondary, high school and vocational school include religious studies as a school subject, part of the school syllabus. The pupil, with the acceptance of the parent or the legal guardian, chooses the religious studies and the confession'

Subsequently, the study of the Religious studies becomes legally mandatory, with the possibility for the pupils not to participate to classes, after having requested so in written by the parent or the legal guardian.

The presence of the religious studies in the Romanian educational system is not an innovation of the post-December period. The public instruction law from 1864, which formed the basis of the Romanian education for more than thirty years and which was one of the first laws from Europe which instituted the mandatory and free status of the schooling system (after Sweden, Norway, Prussia and Italy, but previous to Great Britain, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Serbia, France),

sets religious studies in a privileged position, both in the primary school, where catechism was taught, and in the secondary and high school, where ‘religiunea’ was taught (section 116).

The structure of the new school syllabus for the social school subjects in secondary and high school were preparing in advance the application for these demands for all school subjects from the schooling framework, taking into consideration the Law of National Education no. 1/2011 and according to the recommendation of the European Parliament and European Council from June 18th 2009, both of them establishing a European framework to ensure the quality of the education or professional training.

Thus, in section 68 (1), the law of education talks about the national syllabus for primary and secondary schools and about the eight directions for key skills which help the students evolve.

If Religious studies as a school subject, up until that moment, was covered by the moral curricula and quite limited in range, with the teaching of the skills it gained more coverage.

The skill, the *competence* of a person to act upon something, *based on a deep knowledge* of the situation in question (DEX, 1989) is all about internal motivation. It is then obvious why the principle of triangulation is brought into discussion when it comes to motivating the student: the educational motivation, the civic motivation and the moral motivation.

As we’ll present later on the analysis between the goals-oriented teaching and the skills-oriented teaching it will become obvious the need for a strong internal motivation which will allow the skills transfer in a classroom.

CHAPTER II

Father Staniloae's *contribution to the definition of the notion of individual and communion*

Nothing of what the Father Dumitru Stăniloae teaches us through his entire work is unknown, and I think that all this enthusiasm, this life devoted to theology, that this deep source, rich in wisdom, does not come only through theological reflection, or theoretical theology. There must have been more than a theological thought, more than a persistent dedication to studying and to books. This profound theology came to be written thanks to the sacred gift the Father was given in his life. He thought theology and theologically, but even more than that he lived mystery of Christianity himself, which made him become a chosen man, called by God to serve not only the Holy Shrine but also through his work as an author of theological texts and thus a great witness and preacher of the Holy Trinity.

Father Prof. Dumitru Staniloae is „the gift and the blessing of God for the Romanian school of theology, that he served faithfully all his life”, being seen by his contemporaries as „a preacher of divine love and human dignity”, as „the theologian of Christian love”. He expanded the possibility of human dialogue through his work and he emphasised the value and the particular role of theology in the human existential relationship:” the role of theology nowadays is to offer people the superior understanding of all the things in their life, a final comfort, a strong belief that their actions have an essential role indeed; the purpose of theology is to urge people to participate in these actions with the certitude that they contribute to the fulfilment of God’s plan, Who call His whole creation towards its final aim. Theology of tomorrow must be open to the historical reality and to the world, but must be spiritual at the same time.

PART II

PRACTICAL SURVEY

CHAPTER III

Secondary school students' perception about the religious manifestation of *Person and communion* in orthodoxism as a consequence of studying Religious studies in school

In this chapter we will identify some ways to highlight attitudes and deeds regarding 'God's experience' – the English version of Dogmatic Theology by priest Stăniloae – starting from particular to general, in order to recognise in the students' behaviour the moral implications of their personal communion with God and with other people from an orthodox approach to their training by teaching Religious studies in schools. Moreover, we will identify the contents of the educational infrastructure offered by schools, as a support for spiritual, moral and cultural growth of the students, taking into consideration the vision of the Romanian Orthodox Church of the religious education from schools, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper.

The study from this chapter tries to identify the level of the students' awareness of the religious feeling regarding their communion to God and the rest of the people and of the challenges implied in attaining this feeling and, at the same time, it tries to identify how students understand to use the educational resources provided by the Religious studies class.

In this research there have been involved 460 students, aged 12 to 14, over three school years 2009-2012 and 5 students have participated to a more profound study of the objectives in question over three school years 2012-2014.

The selection of the students wasn't done under precise criteria; the students in question are all from the same secondary school from 2009 to 2012 ('Mircea cel Bătrân' Secondary School No. 13 Pitesti) and the five students mentioned before come from 'Saint Filotea' Secondary School of Excellency, Pitesti.

The reason for choosing students from a secondary school was that students have sufficient knowledge for their age to understand the requests from the questionnaire and answer accordingly, but also because these students are at an age of personal development when they are eager to express their points of view about the relevance of a school subject, how much this subject brings a contribution to their development and how much the skills they acquire help them, according to the orthodox way of living.

The students are part of a very heterogeneous school community, both in ethnicity and in social, financial, demographic, cultural or religious perspective.

General objectives:

1. Establishing the level of understanding of the legal contents by students, baring in mind the purpose of the educational system in schools in general and that of the religious studies in particular;
2. Identifying the main reasons which encourage a positive attitude and interest towards the teaching of the Religious studies in schools, once the new law of education became functional;
3. Establishing the connection between the students' age, their level of understanding of the religious contents, of the legal contents addressed to them by the new law of education.

Specific objectives:

1. Reaching some conclusions about optimalization of the students' religious attitude in secondary schools based on the new law of education;
2. Using students' suggestions to improve their intellectual and emotional input during the Religious studies classes in general and their moral development in particular, using the law which encourages the increase of the beneficiary's satisfaction;
3. Identifying students' concern about forming the religious and moral behaviour taking into consideration Christ's model and educating a positive attitude towards the Christian theology as seen in all school subjects;
4. Identifying the factors which prevent students from reaching the religious feeling by changing the way we teach and by focusing more on the skills transfer.

Practical objectives:

1. Identifying the interactional elements from the act of teaching in order to ease the impact of transforming the teaching from the point of view of the Religious studies in schools;
2. Identifying a strategy which will determine the manifestations of the moral and religious behaviour, using all the motivational and educational resources.

The hypothesis of the research

The general hypothesis of the present paper is:

Assuming that in the current educational system (based on three key elements: the educational framework, the syllabus, the number of students in a classroom) the positive attitude of the students towards religious values – man, personal being, and communion to God and the rest of the people, which are important steps to superior religious ascesis and important values in the skills transfer – is favoured by pedagogical elements (understanding of the information, using the newly acquired knowledge, the family, the teacher's personality, how Religious studies classes are conducted, the structure and contents of the syllabus), by transferring the information based on a goal-oriented teaching and the practical activities , which make the church more visible (charity activities in schools, partnerships between students, parents and teachers in mutual projects and educational programmes between school and church) develops social skills required by law (social and civic skills; cultural manifestation skills) and even learning how to learn skills.

Specific hypothesis of the current research:

The more Religious studies as a school subject dilutes its active moral speech through other school subjects as the skills transfer is operated, the less present it will be in the practical religious actions of the young people and in their participation to the life of the church as basis of the moral and civic development, thus becoming a synthetic educational factor, more in theory.

CONCLUSIONS

Universal priesthood is an imperative for every believer who received Christ's baptism to tell the others, along with priests and bishops, about the benefits of eternal life, which Jesus Christ's sacrifice ensured for us, but especially about how we can enjoy these benefits: *„And you are chosen people, royal priesthood, sacred nation, people chosen by God to tell to the world about the good things of the One who raised you from the dark to His wonderful light”* (I Peter II,9).

The teacher of Religion is the missionary of the Church of Christ in school. He keeps on looking for that illuminating message which helps the pupil see the Church, the main space where one can apply the doctrine of faith. Father Staniloaie makes us understand this easily by urging us to go to the Sacraments, as a means of receiving the saving grace, accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself, which cannot be seen when it comes to sanctify the priests, who are the visible accomplishers of the Sacraments. The communion with God through Church can exist only through the communion of the members of the Church, who bring God : *” gift of pray, that is fruit of the lips, worshipping His name.”* (Jews 13, 15).

Thus, getting the pupil take action deliberately, the teacher of Religion helps him explore his own inner resources, and more than that the communion environment of spiritual Christian living with the entire vision about death and life beyond, promoted by the community man lives in. „The Holy Scripture speaks about the human being as the man as individualised person, Adam, icon of the unseen God. Man is created as the copy of God, more precisely of the Holy Trinity (Creation 1, 26-27). Having a sense of humanity full of spiritual gift, Adam is completed with honesty and wisdom (Psalm 20, 3-4) and offered a place in God's „communion”, in Heaven, where the tree of life is planted (Creation 2, 8-9).