

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ROMANIA

Vasile FILIP¹

Abstract: Ever since Religion has been reinserted in the public schools of Romania it has caused many controversies and even disagreement regarding the decision. An on-going fight was formed between those who pleaded for Religion to be studied in schools just like before, and those who wanted to forbid the existence of that one hour of Religion in schools. While trying to reach a consensus, many talk shows, written articles, petitions, protests took place. Things ranged from compulsory to optional, sometimes those who did not want to take a religion class had to apply for an exemption, and other times things were exactly the opposite. So far, things have not reached a common denominator, so these debates continue to exist. Therefore, in this article we want to make a significant contribution to this controversy, proving that that one hour of religion or religious education in public schools is imperative. The purpose of this article is to make a brief analysis of the situation and to highlight some of the educational advantages that children can acquire through the religion class. Our choice is in favor of religious education in school which, as we shall see, has several advantages and arguments.

Key words: Religion class, education, culture, history, public school, Romania

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious education is defined as „the dimension of education through which the predisposition to religiosity, innate, proper to the human person, is consciously developed, based on didactic principles and with the help of special methods and means“.² It is important because, in addition to the moral, social, cultural purpose, it leads man to the ultimate goal of existence: „a living communion with God“.³ In public schools in Romania, at primary, secondary, high school and vocational level, Religion class is part of the framework plan and is part of the common core. It is part of the curricular area „Man and society“, along with Geography, History, Civic Culture and Civic Education. The framework objectives of Religion class, according to Şebu, are: „1) The knowledge and love of God as the foundation of man’s salvation and perfection; 2) Adequate knowledge and use of language on religious values; 3) Knowledge of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, religious traditions and the history of the Church; 4) The formation of Christian virtues and consolidation of skills of religious moral behavior and 5) Education of attitudes of, acceptance, understanding and respect for those of other faiths and beliefs“.⁴

Since we do not intend to present an exhaustive study on the subject, in the first part we will focus on an overview of Religion class, integrating the problem in the situation of post-communist Romania, while also observing how Religion class is treated in major European countries. We will also try to emphasize the background of the attempt to take the Religion class out of schools. In the second part, we will focus on the need for religion in schools, highlighting the argument of faith or religiosity of the Romanian people, the historical argument of the Romanian people, the cultural argument of the Romanian people and the moral argument.

¹ Ph.D. Student, Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad

² Gheorghe Holbea, Dorin Opreş, Monica Opreş and George Jambore, *Apostolat educațional: Ora de religie – cunoaștere și devenire spirituală*, Bucureşti, Basilica, 2010, p. 24.

³ Sebastian Şebu, Monica Opreş and Dorin Opreş, *Metodica predării religiei*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2000, p. 21.

⁴ Şebu, *Metodica predării religiei*, p. 45

II. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

With the fall of atheist communism in Romania, education in Romania was revised and redefined. Since religion has gained new proportions, the Religion class has been introduced in pre-university education. It was first called „*Moral-religious education*“, and from 1993 the term has changed to „*Religion*“ and first had a non-compulsory character until 1995, when it became a compulsory subject for primary education, optional for lower secondary education, and for high school and vocational school it represented a facultative course, while in the framework plan of primary, secondary, high school and vocational education in 1999, the Religion class became part of the common core, with the possibility that the adult student, with the consent of the parent or legal guardian choose the religious denomination.⁵ If the parent or legal guardian could, by a written request, not attend Religion classes.⁶ Although we have not dealt in detail with the historicity and all the changes and attempts to change the status of the Religion class in public schools, it is certain that since its introduction until now there has been a lot of debate. At the moment, the religion class is part of the common trunk of the curium. The school is obliged to include the Religion class in the school program, but in order to exercise this right, adult students, parents or legal guardians in the case of minors, must submit an application requesting participation in Religion class.

Most European countries agree that religion should be taught in public schools. With the exception of France, the state considers that by supporting religious education it does not lose any of its secularism.⁷ As the former Minister of Education, Mrs. Ecaterina Andronescu, remarks, „there is almost no country in which Religion is not supported by the state and does not have a status in the school curriculum. This status may be optional, in the common core (as in our case) and while it may be in the common core, it still remains mandatory (as in Germany)“.⁸ In 2010, most European countries allocated between 1-3 hours of religion per week to religious education. For example: „*England and Wales - 1 hour; Austria - 2 hours; Belgium - 2 hours; Denmark - 1 hour; Germany - 56-62 hours (per year); Greece - 2 hours; Iceland - 1 hour; Ireland - 92 hours (per year); Italy - 1.5 hours; Luxembourg - 3 hours; Malta - 2 hours; Norway - 78 hours (per year); Portugal - 1 hour; Romania - 1 hour; Spain - 1.5 hours; Sweden - 1 hour etc*“.⁹

Since Religion class occupies such a place in European pre-university education, the following question is legitimate: why are they trying to remove Religion class from schools in Romania? To answer such a question, it is enough to observe the situation of religion in European countries and, implicitly, in Romania. A brief analysis of Europe's history highlights its Christian roots¹⁰ and the importance of religion in its history. It is well known that Europe was considered the central core of Christianity. Having such roots, it is impossible not to notice the impact of religion in the development of education, European thought, politics, morals, etc. But the problem is that now we are trying to desecrate Europe from the religious dimension by forgetting that in fact Europe has come to acquire what it is due to the Christian heritage. Following the French Revolution and the Second Vatican Council, an attempt was made to remove religion from the public sphere and push it into the private sphere. The Christian dimension of Europe today is denied, minimized or ignored, especially in the West, where many Europeans believe they already live in a post-Christian society.¹¹ Many Europeans are anti-Christians, but as participants in a world created by Christianity.¹² „Ultramodernity is the public

⁵ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 44-45.

⁶ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 45.

⁷ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 36.

⁸ Andronescu Ecaterina in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V08Le64Jv5E&t=1457s> – accessed on 10.01.2020.

⁹ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 38.

¹⁰ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 10.

¹¹ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 9.

¹² Alexandru Paleologul, *Moștenirea creștină a Europe*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2003.

space in which religious traditions are unable to be fully relevant to citizens“.¹³ Thus, along with the changes of European culture and in the attempt of the Romanian people to keep up with them, they also try to remove the Religion class from public schools and push the religious education only in the private field, keeping it only at an ecclesial level. But „a true religion, even if exercised only privately, cannot be merely private“.¹⁴ According to Radu Preda, religion in Europe can be analyzed at three levels:

„On the one hand, religion cannot be separated from any of the national public spheres, even if religious actors are not recognized to this extent from the normative point of view the legitimacy of public interventions. At the same time, religion contributes to the creation of a European public space. These two characteristics do not contradict, but complement the idea that religion remains at the same time a private option. Thoughts and feelings developed in the private sphere of the individual inevitably lead to actions and practical consequences in the public sphere“.¹⁵

Therefore, a total separation of state religion is not possible, the two institutions often complement and intertwine. In the following, we will try to show just a few of the proofs that religion in public schools should not be removed.

III. THE NEED FOR RELIGION CLASS IN ROMANIAN SCHOOLS

The need for religious education in public schools in Romania is given by several factors. „The legitimacy of religious education in school is supported by historical, moral, cultural, psychological, sociological, ecumenical, theological and pedagogical arguments“¹⁶. Professor Constantin Cucos, presents eight arguments in favor of the religion class in schools, the cultural, psychological, ethical, sociological, historical, ecumenical, theological and pedagogical argument.¹⁷ In this paper, we have chosen to talk about four arguments in favor of religious education in school.

3.1. First, religious education in public schools in Romania is necessary due to *the faith of the Romanian people*.

In its essence, the Romanian nation is a religious nation. However, it is too much to say that being Romanian is synonymous with being a Christian.¹⁸ Rather, we should regard the Romanian people as religious, and non-religious people as existent as well, but as a minority. According to the 2011 census, 86.45% of the Romanian population declared themselves Orthodox; 4.62% Roman Catholics; 3.19% reformed; 1.92% Pentecostals and so on. Only 0.11% declared themselves atheists, which means that the majority of the Romanian population is religious. This shows us that removing the Religion class from public schools would deprive students of their own culture and faith, which would lead to inculturation. Moreover, most adult students, parents and legal guardians opted for religion class in schools. Therefore, it is inadmissible for a minority to deprive the majority of the knowledge of their own faith.

After all, due to the fact that the Romanian people are religious people, through religious education they can acquire certain moral and even psychological skills. Through education, the child receives the security and peace of mind he needs in order to be able to live in harmony and unity with his peers. For some, the religious factor has a therapeutic effect, it being a refuge from the turmoil of this agitated world. The clergyman, from the beginning of the Christian faith, also

¹³ Radu Preda, *Dumnezeu la Bruxelles: Religia în spațiul public european*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2009, p. 32.

¹⁴ H. R. Patapievici, *Despre politică, religie și naționalism, Idei în dialog*, 10 (13) (octombrie 2005) în Radu Preda, *Dumnezeu la Bruxelles: Religia în spațiul public european*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2009, p. 28.

¹⁵ Preda, *Dumnezeu la Bruxelles*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 40.

¹⁷ Constantin Cucos, Constantin Cucos, *Educația religioasă. Repere teoretice și metodice*, ediția a doua, revizuită și adăugită, Iași, Polirom, 2009, p. 15-17.

¹⁸ For example, Holbea (*Apostolat educațional*, p. 18).

had a therapeutic role in society. Through it, believers find peace of mind and psychological healing, something that children need to know. Maintaining the religion class in schools is a factor of stability in society, it is the observance and nourishment of the faith of the majority. After all, religion class is necessary in schools and out of respect for the faith of the majority of the Romanian people, and if minorities want to give up this right, they can do so by written and reasoned request.

3.2. Secondly, religious education in public schools is necessary considering *the history of the Romanian people*.

From ancient times, the Romanian people were religious people. A simple analysis of the history of the Romanian people highlights the religious dimension of the Romanians. „In the process of forming the Romanian people, since receiving the Gospel preached by the Holy Apostle Andrew, the role of the Church has been decisive in the crystallization of national consciousness, in supporting national identity, in the formation and development of the Romanian literary language“.¹⁹ For a long time, schools operated next to monasteries and churches, and clergy were teachers.²⁰ It is already known that „the first schools and prints in our country were the work of the Church, and representative works of art and crucial historical moments highlight the role of the Church in creating, preserving and transmitting spiritual, moral and cultural values“.²¹ Until 1864, with the adoption of the *Law on Public Instruction*, Romanian education took place almost exclusively within the Church.²² Christian teaching and culture developed through spiritual people. „Monasteries also become real schools of the Romanian people, centuries in a row, before the school became a state-funded institution. The great hierarchs were at the same time great creators of the Romanian school and language“.²³ Just as in many European countries the translation of the Bible into the language of the people meant the beginning of their literary language, so did the „Bible from Bucharest“ of Prince Serban Cantacuzino.²⁴ Having such a history, Romanian education, at least in an honorary way and out of respect for the culture and history of education, currently must be kept at least one hour of Religion in public schools.

Also, a brief analysis of the history of Europe highlights its Christian roots²⁵, it being considered the basin of Christianity. Having such roots, it is impossible not to notice the involvement of religion in the development of education, European thought, politics, education, morals, etc. But the problem is that now we are trying to desecrate Europe from the religious dimension by forgetting that in fact Europe has come to acquire what it is due to the Christian heritage.

3.3. Thirdly, religious education in public schools is necessary considering *the culture of the Romanian people*.

The Romanian people, like the European people, have acquired a strong cultural heritage due to religion. Churches and monasteries were the main means in developing and preserving Romanian culture. Since the culture of the Romanian people is a religious, Christian culture, we deny the cultural and religious factor of the Romanian people would mean to deny the entire Romanian culture. Having a Christian culture, the Romanian people share common Christian values, which unites society. According to Cucuș, „you cannot consider yourself a cultural

¹⁹ Holbea, *Educational Apostolate*, p. 20.

²⁰ Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Gheorghe Holbea, Dorin Opreș, Monica Opreș și George Jambore, *Apostolat educațional: Ora de religie – cunoaștere și devenire spirituală*, București, Basilica, 2010, p. 6.

²¹ Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 6

²² Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 6.

²³ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 19-20.

²⁴ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 12.

²⁵ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 10.

person if you do not know your own religious references or those of the people you live with in a community, if you know nothing about the history of beliefs and religions, if you do not understand the phenomenology of the religious act“.²⁶ The church’s contribution to the national cultural treasury cannot be challenged or considered a „false history“, as it is clearly recognized by the *Law on Religious Freedom and the General Regime of Cults, art. 7 para. 2*.²⁷

To talk about just a few aspects of this culture. For example, the Romanian people celebrate on Sunday because this is the day when Jesus Christ rose and practically, Sunday is a day held in his honor. We have the holiday of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and many other holidays that Romanians respect due to Christian culture. We have certain customs, churches and religious buildings that we respect because of Christian culture. Romanian art, literature, music, family and morality are of Christian origin, which would make depriving the child of such things to be less educated. Therefore, it is impossible to deny the cultural or religious factor. It takes at least a minimum amount of religious knowledge, the child must be informed why the Romanian people are a Christian people, what it means to be Christian, what is the difference between the Christian faith and other faiths or religions of the world. The child needs at least an introduction and a brief history of the world’s beliefs and religions. „*In a world characterized by increasing ethnic and religious diversity, religious education aims to know one’s own identity, but also those of other faiths and beliefs, promotes social inclusion and contributes to overcoming prejudices and any forms of discrimination*“.²⁸ Thus, depriving the child of religious education means depriving him of the culture in which he lives, or this would lead to a negative impact on society. Western society encourages culture, therefore it should allow children to cultivate in such an environment. To preserve and cultivate this European and, of course, Romanian culture is possible only through national means of education, and this involves public schools.

3.4. Third, religious education in public schools is necessary because of *the ethical or moral weight*.

The morality of the Romanian people is based on Christian morality. With the Christianization of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space, the Romanian people tried to develop a morality based on Holy Scripture and Christian values. Through religious education, this moral tradition is cultivated in the child’s psyche. But not only is Christian morality maintained and cultivated, but religious teaching itself is laden with ethical and moral teachings. This is given by Christian morality based on the participation or change brought by Christ in the lives of believers. The superiority of Christian morality over any morality or ethics lies in the fact that it is not a utopia but is real and possible. Through the participation of believers in Christ, they are brought to a new, changed life and receive the freedom or opportunity to fulfill God’s commandments. The failure of the Old Law (Old Testament Law) and any current or past ethical system is that people received the commandments and were told how to live, but were not given the power to fulfill those commandments. Instead, in Christian morality, believers also received the commandment, but they also received the power necessary to carry out the commandments.²⁹ He who makes this possible is the Spirit of God who vitalizes believers for a new life, He being the source of life. Thus, through religious education, children have the opportunity to know this

²⁶ Cucos, *Educația religioasă*, p. 15.

²⁷ Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 6.

²⁸ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 26.

²⁹ Many Christian scholars speak of Christian ethics as being closely linked to the death and resurrection of Christ and the presence of the Spirit in believers. Among them, we recommend Rabens, Volker, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2010; Oliver, O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986; Michael, J. Gorman, *Participating in Christ, Explorations in Paul’s Theology and Spirituality*, Michigan. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2019; Gordon D. Fee, *Gad’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.

morality. In the midst of Christian morality is love, which is the key around which morality develops.

European morality has its origins in Christian morality. Therefore, trying to get religion out of public schools means depriving children of their moral foundation. European society is going through a crisis of moral orientation. If in the past one could not conceive in Europe a morality other than the Christian one, today one tries to implement another morality, based on the atheist postmodernist culture.³⁰ This has led to moral instability, cultural insecurity and political crises.³¹ Laurențiu Petrila, in his work „The crisis of European values in the context of globalization“ talks about the European situation which is in a crisis of identity and morality.³² The confusion that being modern or free means being secular is at the root of the moral crisis of European civilization.³³ We appreciate European culture and we want Romania to develop a culture and education as efficient as possible, but in the process of development we need discernment. Therefore, we believe that Romania and the Romanian education system must be careful not to enter the same crisis of morality. By accepting religion in public schools, morality and society retain one of the main educational and stabilizing factors of society³⁴.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in this paper, since Religion has been introduced in the public schools of Romania, this has caused a lot of controversy and debate. Although we cannot claim to have shed full light on the subject, we consider that through this work we contribute or have taken a step towards elucidating the problem. It has been proven that both in Romania and in most European countries, the Religion class is part of the pre-university education framework plan, being part of the common core. We have shown that attempts to remove religion class from schools are unfounded due to several factors. It has been showed that the Religion class is necessary first of all, due to the faith of the majority of Romanian people. Secondly, it has been exemplified that the Religion class is necessary considering the history of the Romanian people. Thirdly, it has been pointed out that the Religion class is necessary considering the culture of the Romanian people. And fourth, it has been shown that the Religion class is necessary for the morality we acquire through it.

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³⁰ According to David A. Noebel, „all important postmodernist writers were atheists, including Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Bataille, Barthes, Baudrillard, Macherey, Deleuze, Guattari, and Lacan“ (David A. Noebel, *Înțelegerea vremurilor*, Oradea, Cartea Creștină, 2013, p. 104)

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, in his work „*Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*“ talks about contemporary society as being characterized by cultural conflicts due to cultural and religious differences (Samuel P. Huntington, „*Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*“, București, Antet, 2012).

³² Laurențiu Petrila, *Criza valorilor europene în contextul globalizării: Perspective identitare asupra Europei*, București, Eikon, 2019.

³³ Holbea, *Apostolat educațional*, p. 13-14.

³⁴ Petrila, Laurențiu, Religion and its implication for global politics, *Research Science Today*, No. 1(19), pp. 87-98, 2020.