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The Holy Scripture and the Access through It to the Dynamics and Dimension of Religious Education of Young People

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Abstract

The present study entitled *The Holy Scripture and the access through it to the dynamics and dimension of religious education of young people*, aims to highlight the importance of the Holy Scripture in the religious education of young people in the contemporary context. As a source of divine revelation, the Holy Scripture is addressed to all mankind, giving us fundamental rules and important norms of education and conduct for life.

Because religious education occupies a well-defined place in the complex process of human character formation, it provides young people with an integrative spiritual horizon through which they have the opportunity to relate and integrate themselves more easily into society.

Moreover, a thorough and complex training of young people cannot be lacking in any way in its religious component, religious education being imperative in the perspective of acquiring an integrity and a moral and intellectual character, mostly in the perspective of completing the information field as widely as possible in the formation of a complex intellectual, moral and cultural personality.

The religious education of young people is particularly important, because without a minimum of religious training, young people are vulnerable to the current challenges of the contemporary society. The spread of secular, secular-atheist ideologies is trying to alienate young people from the faith and the perennial values of religious education. All these aspects cause us to highlight the dynamics, meaning and a great importance of *the religious education of young people*.

Keywords

Holy Scripture, dynamics, religious education, educational value, young people.

I. Introduction

The Holy Scripture as a source of divine revelation is a collection of holy books that are addressed to all mankind for the purpose of acquiring eternal life¹, but at the same time it provides norms, fundamental rules of education and conduct for life.

Religious education occupies a well-defined place in the complex process of human character formation. Religious education offers young people an integrative spiritual horizon, a binder that gives them the opportunity to relate and integrate more easily into society². Because the school systematically prepares the person in the intellectual, moral, civic, aesthetic and hygienic perspective, the religious component is added to them naturally and organically, following the complementarity and continuity of instructive and formative order.

A thorough and complex training of young people cannot be lacking in any way of its religious component, at least at the informative and cultural level.

Religious education is imperative in the perspective of acquiring an integrity, moral and intellectual character, as well as the completion of the information field on a large scale in the formation of a complex intellectual, moral and cultural personality.

II. The Holy Scripture - vector for the transmission of religious education

From the prologue of this biblical exposition, I would like to point out that the specialized biblical literature has stated that the Bible or Holy Scripture is the most read book in all world literature and for this reason the Holy Scripture is the most recommended book for priests, believers and “mostly for young people, as an *evangelical praeparatio*”³, because each of us has

¹ Pr. Prof. dr. Nicolae I. NICOLAESCU, Grigorie MARCU, Sofron VLAD, Liviu G. MUNTEANU, *Studiul Noului Testament – Ediția a doua*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1977, p. 5.

² P.F. Părinte DANIEL, “Educația religioasă - formarea tinerilor pentru viață”, in: *Educația religioasă a tinerilor în contextual secularizării*, Editura Basilica, București, 2017, p. 14.

³ Mircea BASARAB, *Interpretarea Sfintei Scripturi în Biserica Ortodoxă*, Editura Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 45.

the opportunity to find in its pages a true spiritual nourishment and a true standard of education and conduct.

Even if the contemporary society is characterized by a sui-generis dynamism⁴, education, as we have stated before, “is an evolutionary and complex process carried out during several stages and aims at a certain finality, a finality that considers the formation and development of the intellectual, moral and physical qualities of people and society”⁵.

However, religious education has deeply influenced humanity, being an unsurpassed art of guiding the soul, of exhortation to love God and people, to the agonizing of inner peace and the zeal of eternal joy. “Religious education is a value that makes integrator sense of the other directions of knowledge”⁶.

Religious education of young people is particularly important, because without a minimum of religious formation, young people are vulnerable to the challenges of the contemporary society, a society dominated by secularization, materialism and religious indifference⁷.

A multitude of nefarious ideologies, of secular-atheistic nature, try to alienate young people from the faith and values fundamentally Christian⁸. All these aspects determine us to highlight the meaning and importance of religious education.

If researchers in the field say that education is possible in all periods of life, then certainly education is possible and necessary from an early age, because the very soul of the child has inside the necessary for this, “thus, religious education and childhood are intertwined in a logical fabric”⁹.

Religious education is imperative and must be provided to the child from the earliest years of life. In this respect, Vasile Băncilă makes an interesting comparison: “if it doesn’t rain in spring, it will rain later in

⁴ Florica ORȚAN, “Educația, învățământul și societatea contemporană în secolul XXI: context, tendințe, reforme. Documente și strategii UE și CE (Lisabona, Bologna, Copenhaga, Berlin)”, in: *Pedagogie și elemente de Psihologie*, Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, p. 10.

⁵ Ștefănel GHEORGHE, *Educația religioasă*, study published on February 25, 2011, see <https://www.crestinortodox.ro>, accessed on 11/26/2021, 08:35.

⁶ Tudor VIANU, *Estetica*, Editura pentru literatură, București, 1968, p. 88-90.

⁷ Prof.univ.dr. Nifon MIHĂIȚĂ, “Relevanța educației în formarea tinerilor. Educația moral-religioasă astăzi: Provocări și perspective”, in: *Misiune, spiritualitate și cultură*, Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2016, p. 11.

⁸ Ion BRIA, *Comentariu la Catehismul Ortodox*, Editura Oastea Domnului, Sibiu, 2000, p. 12.

⁹ Ion DRĂGAN, *Psihologia pentru toți*, Editura Științifică, București, 1991, p. 15.

vain”¹⁰, this phrase having the role of emphasizing the importance and necessity of religious education at the right time.

Due to the fact that man is a dichotomous being, so eminently religious, his soul is structurally related to religious reality. These two elements subsist in a perfect organic unity¹¹.

Religious education offers a special purity to the souls of young people and, at the same time, raises it through love. In this context, the Savior Christ addressed his countrymen, saying, “Let the children come to Me” (Matthew 19, 14), or “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will rest you” (Matthew 11, 28).

The Savior addresses this insistent call mainly to the young, because in the years of youth, man fixes his ideal of life and shapes important traits of moral conduct.

Balanced development depends a lot on the family, on the social environment, but with a predilection on institutions dealing with education. The church and the school are meant to strengthen young people faculty of distinguishing good from evil, of learning an attitude full of moral beauty. The collaboration between family and school in order to offer young people a balanced development is in agreement with the answers to the latest challenges of the contemporary society and with the desire to support the spread of the Romanian nation¹².

III. The stages of preparing religious education

Religious education begins with man. From the contents of the Holy Scripture we understand that “with the creation of man as a being capable of sharing in the divine goodness and of consciously participating in it”¹³, God gives him the Law, the norms of life, offers him certain teachings that are constituted in the contents of Revelation.

¹⁰ Vasile BĂNCILĂ, *Inițierea religioasă a copilului*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1996, p. 21.

¹¹ Sfântul GRIGORIE DE NYSA, “Marele cuvânt catehetic”, in: *Scrieri, Partea a II-a*, transl. Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 30, Ediura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, p. 297.

¹² Radu PREDĂ, “Religia și Școala”, in: *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai – Theologia Orthodoxa I*, (2014), p. 105.

¹³ Pr. Dr. Vasile RĂDUCĂ, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 60.

However, since the Holy Scripture is a book of divine-human origin, it cannot be read like any other book. It requires certain stages of prior preparation, both physical and mental. Insisting on spiritual purity, St. John Chrysostom in Homily 1, 3 of the Holy Gospel of John states,

“We cannot gain much from reading the Holy Scripture unless we have purified our souls first...let us therefore adorn our souls with the reading of the divine scriptures, not only today, nor only on the day when we hear [these words], but throughout all the days of our lives; because it’s good to always listen to them”¹⁴.

The biblical text is one of the main pillars on which the whole educational-formative approach of young people is based. Spiritual-religious formation and education of young people, “begins in the family, continues in school, including through the study of the scripturalistic text and is completed in the Church”¹⁵.

The revealed biblical text is valuable both in that it has been transmitted to us through divine discovery, as well as through its positive constructive message. The careful analysis of the scriptural text highlights the continuous call of the Divinity to man, to return to the initial (paradisiacal) state of his soul. The way God’s call appears in the themes that support the biblical text is one that gives hope: man is invited in a direct way to strive to achieve the purpose for which he is called, having the power to progress for the better, aided by the divine grace¹⁶.

The man’s endeavor is intertwined with divine help, which gives the message of Scripture a positive character.

As concerns the constructive character of the revealed message, the return to Divinity supposes conscious and free participation of man in the process of “building” his own soul, an effort which man submits, cooperating with the grace which God bestowed upon him. The appropriation of the teachings of Holy Scripture by young people will be made much

¹⁴ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilia la Sfânta Evanghelie după Ioan - Omilia 1,3*, volumul I, transl. Maria-Iulia Rizeanu and Mihail Grigoraș, Editura Basilica, București, 2016, pp. 11-17.

¹⁵ IPS LAURENȚIU, “Educația tinerilor pentru apărarea și promovarea familiei creștine tradiționale”, in: *Educația religioasă a tinerilor în contextual secularizării*, Editura Basilica, București, 2017, p. 49.

¹⁶ Mircea NIȘCOVEANU, “Hristologia Sfântului Ioan Damaschin”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XVI (1965) 3, p. 329.

easier if they realize the importance of applying biblical precepts in daily life, as opposed to their mere memorization or treating them as a theory without cover in facts.

The formative character of the biblical text is generated by the presence of the multitude of examples bearing messages in the center of which there are human archetypes with a modeling role, and “which is the foundation of all that follows in the entire life”¹⁷. Biblical characters have an impact on the characters in formation because of their agreement with the moral values according to which, consciously or not, each of us longs, starting from the youngest age.

The sage Solomon conveys the exhortation: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22, 6)¹⁸.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, in order to read the Holy Scriptures, young people must go through several stages and possess as many virtues as possible, including: pure heart, awake conscience, good thinking, calm, honesty and justice, lack of prejudices, cunning and vain ambitions. This is because the pure heart and the good mind, reconciled to God and to fellow men, pass through heaven and raise the soul to the sight of God, to the supreme Christian happiness¹⁹.

Reading Scripture is not only a duty of every Christian, but even a natural necessity of the human soul, because it encompasses divine Revelation. In this way, man “acquires the knowledge of the divine mysteries, remembers the virtue of the righteous, understands how great is the goodness of God, and how many are the rewards which He bestows upon all who love Him”²⁰.

In the Fifth Homily on the Gospel of Matthew, St. John Chrysostom states: “It is good for the whole family, and their wives and children, to read the Holy Scripture, all of them to repeat the beautiful teachings of the divine Scripture”²¹.

¹⁷ Johann Amos COMENIUS, *Pampaedia*, Ediura Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucuresti, 1977, p. 121.

¹⁸ IPS ANDREI, “Familia, copiii și tinerii, educarea lor și viitorul omenirii”, in: *Educația religioasă a tinerilor în contextual secularizării*, Editura Basilica, București, 2017, pp.64-65.

¹⁹ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Părinti, copii și creșterea lor*, Editura Panaghia, p.12.

²⁰ Dr. Iustin MOISESCU, “Folosul citirii Sfintei Scripturi după Sfântul Ioan Hrisostom”, in: *Revista Teologică*, XXXVI (1943) 1-2, p. 91.

²¹ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, “Omiliile la Matei”, in: *Scrieri, Partea Treia, Omilia a V-a*, translation, index and notes by Pr. D. Fecioru Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 66.

Speaking of true spiritual nourishment, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes that the reading of the divine Scriptures is the true daily nourishment of the soul: “we feed on them, always to keep them in us, to always meditate on them”²². In other words, what is nourishment for the body is the teaching of the divine Scriptures for the soul.

Reading the Holy Scriptures is “a natural necessity of the human soul. The soul, like the body, needs a food proper to its being”²³, said the Archbishop of Constantinople, for as the body needs food perceptible through the senses, so the soul needs a daily exhortation and spiritual food²⁴. As hunger is a proof of the health of the body, so the love of the words of the divine Scriptures is a proof of the health of the soul.

IV. The educational value of the Holy Scriptures

The superiority of Holy Scripture and its educational value have been recognized directly or indirectly by humanity. Its main purpose is to show us the ways in which we can save our souls, the essential purpose of man on earth.

By reading it, the soul ascends to God, purifies itself, finds the balance of its whole life, and attains soul salvation. That is why Saint John Chrysostom presents it as a treasure to those who want to research it in detail, because it contains a great wealth of ideas:

“It is a spiritual treasure, which is shared and never spent, it enriches everyone and with nothing does it diminish, but on the contrary, it grows. As if you could take a little of everything from a golden treasure, you would get rich a lot, so it is with the divine Scripture. In a short text you can find a lot of power of thought, unspeakable wealth. Such is the nature of this treasure! Enrich those who receive it and never diminish, for the source of the Holy Spirit pours out this treasure!”²⁵

²² Sfântul IOAN HRISOSTOM, *Comentarii la Epistola a II-a către Timotei, Omilia I*, PG 62, 559-600.

²³ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Facere – Omilia a XI-a*, translation by Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 114.

²⁴ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Facere – Omilia a VIII-a*, pp. 80-85.

²⁵ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Facere – Omilia a XVI-a*, pp. 168-169.

Given these considerations that reflect the educational value of Holy Scripture, it is preferable for every Christian, theologian, priest, or lay person, to reflect carefully, faith, and piety on Holy Scripture and read it meditating on the teachings that result from it. Continued meditation on the divine Scriptures is the path to spiritual health²⁶.

Highlighting the value of the Holy Scripture, the greatest Holy Father of the Church calls it the true daily food of the soul, saying: “just as we claim this (bodily) food every day, so must we always ask for the words of faith, always feed ourselves with them, let us always keep them in us, always meditate on them, because they are not ordinary food”²⁷.

In other words, it can be said that what is food for the body, that is the teaching of the divine words for the soul, because “just as the body needs food perceptible through the senses, so the soul needs a daily exhortation and spiritual food to be able to restrain the body’s vagaries”²⁸, “the reading of the Holy Scripture being the food of the soul, its adornment and security”²⁹.

Through the themes of reflection and through the landmarks that we acquire after reading the sacred text, we raise our souls to God, we console ourselves in the sufferings that we go through, thus finding solutions to all our dilemmas and problems. Holy Scripture “is not circumscribed to the word, but embraces the heart, transcends the mind, and nourishes the soul”³⁰.

Meditating on its broad content, we find that Holy Scripture is the most authentic and safest guide for our personal and community life and the best guide to our perfection and salvation.

Therefore, reading the Holy Scriptures is a defining component of religious education. The importance of achieving an integrative religious education of children and young people, in the perspective of their formation is a sine qua non condition in the context of the current secularization.

²⁶ Jaroslav PELIKAN, *The Christian Tradition a History of the Development of Doctrine, 2. The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, Licensed by The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1974, p. 46.

²⁷ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Comentariu la Epistola I-a către Timotei – Omilia a XII-a*, PG 62, 559.

²⁸ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Facere – Omilia a VIII-a*, p. 87.

²⁹ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omilii la Matei, Omilia 2, 6*, p. 35.

³⁰ Ioan CHIRILĂ, *Sfânta Scriptură – Cuvântul cuvintelor*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, p. 59.

V. Conclusions

Quensequently, we can say that the Holy Scriptures are the leading book of Christians, for spiritual and moral growth, for salvation. Because salvation depends on the fulfillment of divine commandments and they are contained in the Holy Scripture, it is very important that our daily preoccupations include the reading of the Holy Scriptures. St. John Chrysostom endeavored to do the same in his homilies when he spoke of the Holy Scripture and its major role in the lives of believers.

Religious education proves to be essential in structuring goals and outlining one's wishes, aspirations, thoughts and actions. For many young people who do not refuse the religious experience and who want to find out about the fundamentals of faith values, religion and spirituality prove to be important sources of hope, ideals and life models which can influence the development of their identity in adolescence and not only that, but even throughout their lives.