THEORIES AND STRATEGIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION IN PROMOTING MORALITY AND SPIRITUAL VALUES IN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract:Childhood and adolescence are considered safe and secure periods of time, but also imaginative explorations ages into an ever challenging world. For too many young people, the world is a dangerous place. Family and school influences and resources, with particular reference to religiousness, are essential for the development of wise youth. Religious communication and education has a significant part to play in this process. It may help children and adolescents consider their attitudes and motivations, learn about differences between themselves and others, begin to shape their own opinions and make considered ethical judgements. Parents should be fully aware of the aims, practices and positive effects of religious communication and education in the educational institutions. It is desirable the involvement in the adolescents' education through the encouragement of parents to become involved with their children's work, by facilitating the implementation of the religious education from different faiths. Family and school co-operation and responsibility will certainly lead to the encouragement of the adolescents' values of confidence, respect and self- esteem.

Keywords: religious communication, moral and spiritual issues, family and school strategies, adolescent religiousness

Theories on moral and spiritual issues in adolescents

Adolescence is a period characterized by a personal quest for meaning, purpose, career and relationships. Given that adolescents are at the crossroads of their lives and face many challenges, they need to critically reflect on practical interests and examine broad issues on the importance of spirituality in their lives. Confronted with issues and concepts that are embedded in existential and transcendent realms, adolescents undergo major identity transformations in this period of life[1]. They experience great ambiguity and uncertainty as they move beyond an absolute form of knowing based on authority towards multiple perspectives, critical self- awareness and construction of one's own beliefs and values[2].

According to many experts in the field, the educational process that occurs during enrollment in student affairs graduate preparation programs should include more elements of spiritual development, and the development of such a proficiency should occur within these programs[3].

The integration of spirituality into higher education may assist in the personal and educational development of both undergraduate and graduate students. John Call Dalton, an American physiologist and the first full-time professor for physiology in the United States claims that "spirituality is especially important in the learning and experiences of college

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[1] Benson, P. L., Roehlkepartain, E. C., & Rude, S.P., *Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Toward a field of inquiry. Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 204-212, 2003

[2] Love, P. G., *Spirituality and student development: Theoretical connections*, published in M.A. Jablonski (Ed.), **The implications of student spirituality for student affairs practice. New Directions for Student Services**, 95, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001, p. 38

[3] Chickering, A.W., Dalton, J. C., & Stamm, L., *Encouraging authenticity & spirituality in higher education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006, p. 111

students because late adolescence is a time of heightened sensitivity about personal identity, relationships, ideology, and decisions about the future" [4]. Similarly, James W. Fowler III, an American theologian, professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University, argued that growth and development in the area of spirituality continues during the graduate education process, and each indicated that a supportive culture is essential to the continued development of the individual[5].

The American psychologist Stanley Hall argued that adolescence is inevitably "a period of storm and stress", hormonal changes of puberty are causing upheavals for the adolescent person and those around him. Precisely because this restlessness is biologically determined, being inevitable, according to Hall.

Teenagers' judgments and awareness are qualitatively different from those manifested during childhood. According to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, teens are able to perceive the moral issues in terms of fundamental moral principles such as fairness or equity, rather than assimilate their concrete expressions. There is even talk of a philosophical trend that is increasing at this age.

Students in late adolescence experience"heightened sensitivity about personal identity, ideology, relationships and decisions about the future" when "concerns about individual purpose, meaning and commitment interact with forces of cognitive development, maturation and social expectations"[6].

The ability to examine spirituality as a differentiable concept from faith and religion is an outgrowth of recent cultural sentiments[7]. It is clear from the literature that most individuals in current society prefer to use the term *spiritual* over *religion* when discussing such matters with college students and colleagues[8]; moreover, undergraduate students often describe themselves as spiritual but not religious beings[9]. The perception within society and higher education that religion and spirituality are unique concepts developed only in the last few decades[10].

In a society that, for different reasons, doubt and cynicism, fear and helplessness, immaturity and childishness do exist, some young people tend to stay at the level of primary gratification. They find it hard to be grown-up and mature. Maturity usually defines personalities that have managed to put in place the basic functions of their psychological selves and who are able to differentiate between their inner lives and their surroundings. Many young people who remain psychologically immature often have trouble making this distinction. Religious communication becomes a transcendent force with a claim to authority higher than that of other forms of speech. Religious speech, because it has the capacity to motivate large-scale attitudes, raises important questions as to the manner by which national and global identities are formed. It is fairly clear that there is a need, in terms of global and comparative perspectives, to explore alternative schemes for thinking about the role of the state with respect to religious communication.

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[4] Dalton, J. C., *Career and calling: Finding a place for the spirit in work and community*, published in M.A. Jablonski (Ed.),**The implications of student spirituality for student affairs practice. New Directions for Student Services,** 95, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001, p. 18

[5] Fowler, J. W., *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981, p.56

[6] Dalton, J. C, *op.cit*, p.18

[7] Cherry, C., De Berg, B. A, & Porterfield, A., *Religion on campus. Liberal Education*, 87(4), 7-13, 2001

[8] Astin, A. A., *Why spirituality deserves a central place in higher education*, Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter, 1(1), 2004. from http://spirituality.ucla.edu/newsletter/past/Volume%20I/1/email.html

[9] Love, P. G, *op.cit*., p. 39

[10] Hill, P. C., & Hood, R. W., Jr., *Affect, religion, and unconscious processes*, published in **Journal of Personality**, 67, 1016-1046, 1999, accessed on http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2202/1940-1639.1441,

Desirable family and school strategies and directions in the religious communication

Particularly in the years prior to adolescence, parental religiosity and spirituality may have a more powerful impact on child well-being than does the child's own self-reported religiosity. Parents' religiosity may influence the behaviors and beliefs that they model for their children. Children's character is not shaped only by words and activities, but also by living the example of their parents. Harmonious bond with parents, intensive in the early childhood, is the basic element of their training. On the contrary, the lack of harmony in relationships between parents influence negatively the entire life of children.

Parental authority must be based not on coercion or violence, but on love, dialogue and support. The content and quality of religious communication between parents and children is the key to Christian education. Christian family consisting of a man, woman and child is the most precious intimate space for the cultivation of conjugal, parental and brotherly love. Lack of love and communion in the family leads to the alienation among its members, to marital and domestic violence, divorce, alcoholism and school abandonment, with dramatic effects for children.

In the contemporary society tormented and in a fast change, which exerts a strong pressure on the child through multiple news and temptations, the religious dialogue of parents with their son or daughter, for a correct understanding of values, is extremely necessary. The child is not called to follow a contingent way of life, but must select his own way from a lot of possibilities that are offered to him. In nowadays secularized society, living the economic, moral and spiritual recession, the Christian family is facing serious financial, social, moral and spiritual problems, and defending, promoting and strengthening the sacred institution of the family foundation on the perennial Gospel values must be a permanent mission of the Church and a responsibility of the society as a whole.

Regarded as a social phenomenon, education means formation, development and transmission of life experience from one generation to another, knowing good manners and behavior in society in accordance with these skills. But viewed from a religious perspective, education has not to do only with the teaching of theoretical information, with abstractions, but its meaning is much higher, much deeper and more noble because it envisages the shaping of character, skills and moral and social attitudes.

In today's crisis of identity and orientation, to talk about the religious education of youth, moreover to implement it, is not very easy, it is a delicate mission to which family and then the institutionalized environments, such as school and church are called to share with supported efforts.

Speaking about the nourishment for the soul, St. John Chrysostom mentions that the desire for reading and living the Holy Scripture is a daily genuine nourishment for the soul: ”like this bodily nourishment we claim every day, so we must always ask the words of faith, always feed with them, always keep them in ourselves, always meditate on them, because they are not ordinary nourishment”[11].

The study of the religious communication among adolescents know little research in child development psychology, which seems surprising given that psychologists such as Stanley Hall acknowledged that adolescence and childhood are important periods in the moral-religious development. If we define spirituality as thirst for the transcendent dimension and search for meaning, then we certainly can say that adolescents have strong spiritual concerns: they intensely seek veneration with an intensity that sometimes even adults do not

[11] Sfântul Ioan Hrisostomul, *Omilia a XII-a la Epistola I-a către Timotei,* (*Homily XII of the First Epistle to Timothy*), în P.G. 62, col. 59.

exceed. Childhood and adolescence are stages of spiritual becoming particularly important, precisely because it is then when there are formed the first spiritual habits of the future adult. Moreover, the young man is not just a miniature adult; his religious life is complex and has unique characteristics.

It could be suggested that the main reason why religion should be included in education is because it exists. It is an aspect of life, of human experience. Some children are members of religious communities and are brought up by their families to learn and practise a particular faith. Other children encounter religion in different ways: even if they or their families are not practising members of any religious faith, they are aware of churches, mosques, synagogues or other religious buildings, perhaps in their locality, in the media, on the internet or on holiday; they hear people talking about religious characters or events; they may attend special occasions such as weddings, funerals or festivals in religious places of worship; many stories, novels, songs, films, paintings and theatre performances include references to religious places or ideas. Religious communication and education should help children explore these aspects of life and see how they relate to other parts of human experience.

Fast and dramatic growth and development period, adolescence presents many challenges for those faced with the transition from childhood to adulthood. Sometimes brutal, sometimes clumsy, unstable or extreme, teens prove that they lost, somehow, balance and contact with the outside world. Adolescents' attention is capricious, sometimes with bizarre mood, impulsive tendencies, moments of shyness, sudden anger, they are also easily irritated, sometimes crying, sometimes laughing, apparently for no reason. Although some are paradoxical ideas, they often express them trenchantly. The family environment appears to be too narrow and too fragile to them and often moral laws, social commandments or spiritual life recommendations seem to be too constrictive[12].

Upon the limitation of formal spaces for religious interaction, school spaces for religious interaction and socialization are still available at both secular school and faith-based school. Many parents have sent their children to get education at faith-based schools, which is actually different from their religious background.

Unfortunately, teenagers with little culture and religious life see religion as a system of rules and regulations that must be refused, unlike the others who understand and experience religious life as a personal relationship with God. It is also why some psychologists say that religion will not be accepted by the teens on the intrinsic way until they will feel it like an experience that brings true joy and meaning in their lives[13].

It is when parents are more religious than their adolescent children and not when parents are less religious than their children, that parent-adolescent religious discrepancy is positively associated with adolescent maladjustment.

Religious discrepancies and the differences in beliefs, values and behavioral preferences that are inherent in them might contribute to poor communication and estrangement between adolescents and parents, which might in turn cause adolescents to feel rejected, anxious, or guilty about turning away from beliefs and practices that the parents cherish, or angry that their parents are judging their behavior according to religious standards that the adolescents themselves do not recognize as valid[14].

Adolescents who are less religious than their parents are at risk for externalizing and internalizing symptoms and the mediating role of the parent is to help develop a qality

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[12] Enăchescu, Constantin, *Tratat de igienă mintală (Treaty of Mental Hygiene),* Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 2008, p. 167.

[13] Pr. Rusu, Ilie, *Psihologia religioasă în dialog cu morala creştină (Religious Psychology in Dialogue with Christian Morality),* Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Sucevei şi Rădăuţilor, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, 1998, p.72

[14] Tangney, J.P., Dearing, R.L., *Shame and guilt,* New York, NY: Guildford Press, 2002.

relationship adolescence, period of time marked by numerous changes, critical developmental tasks, and increased questioning and confusion about the future[15]. Not surprisingly, a significant number of adolescents suffer from depressive symptoms, with estimates ranging from 2% to 18%[16].

Religious communication can play important roles in the psychological well-being of adolescents and the functioning of their families. Adolescent religiousness is associated with protection from many negative outcomes, including internalizing problems such as depression and externalizing problems such as delinquency[17]. Moreover, religious communication is generally associated with indicators of good family functioning. For example, mothers' views of the importance of religion has a strong positive association with both mothers' and children's reports of mother-child relationship quality[18], and adolescents who attend church tend to report more involvement in, and satisfaction with, their families[19]. Parental religiousness is also positively related to warm and supportive parenting behaviors and effective monitoring. Adolescents are looking for a way to express their spiritual nature, and organizations such as churches and faith-based teen clubs can attract them if they offer lively discussion and activities that encourage youth to explore faith in a relevant way. Teens who express their faith in home through prayer, Scripture reading and other religious practices are more likely to retain their faith into their adult years. Strong parental leadership seems to help teens find and keep a strong spiritual faith[20].

Before the exile, children's education was made by parents and educators and afterwards in public schools. During the our Savior Jesus Christ, there were independent schools or affiliated to synagogues, and in those schools the educator used to teach from his chair, and the children and young people eager to learn were sitting down watching him. With the coming of the Savior, education takes on a different connotation, the Saviour being ,"the educator par excellence"[21]. He was found to be well acquainted with all peculiarities of the human soul. Christian education "promotes the primacy of purity from sin, of goodness, holiness, justice, equality, humility, love for man, even when he is your enemy, of love to God, of perfection and salvation. Christian education means total conversion to Christ"[22].

Unfortunately, standards went down and requirements went down as well. If the medieval society had as a social ideal people holiness, the society where we live got to be satisfied with "humanizing" them. We live in a world where gradually Christian values have been abandoned or rather, we live in a society that has never known and accepted them fully

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[15] Peterson, A., C., Kennedy, R., E., & Sullivan, P., *Coping with adolescence*, in M. E. Colten & S. Gore (Eds.), **Adolescent stress: Causes and consequences**, New York: Al-dine de Gruyter, 1991, pp. 94-95

[16] Silverman, W. K., & Ginsburg, G. S., *Anxiety disorders*, in T.H. Ollendick & M. Hersen (Eds.), **Handbook of child psycho-pathology**, New York: Plenum, 1998, p.252

[17] Perez, J. E., *Religion and depression: Review and meta-analysis*, unpublished manuscript, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 2001, accessed on http://www.agencylab.ku.edu/~agencylab/manuscripts/(Pearce,%20Perez%20and%20Little%202003).pdf

[18] Pearce, L.D., Axinn, W.G., The impact of family religious life on the quality of mother-child relations, American Sociological Review, 1998

[19] Smith, C., Theorizing religious effects among American adolescents, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2003, p. 26

[20] *Barr, Kathryn Rateliff, Spiritual Development in Adolescents*, accessed on http://oureverydaylife.com/spiritual-development-adolescents-6029.html

[21] Clement Alexandrinul, *Pedagogul, (The Educator)*, Editura Librăriei Teologice, București, 1939, p. 21.

[22] Coman, I. G., *Frumusețile iubirii de oameni în spiritualitatea patristică, (The Beauties of Love for People in the Patristic Spirituality)*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1988, p. 22.

and consciously. The nowadays world must be reattached to Christian values and sensitized to the refined values of Christian education[23].

Some educators believe that it is unconstitutional to teach students about religion. Others fear that including religion in the curriculum will be prohibitively controversial. Many teachers do not feel competent to teach about religion in public schools. Because religion plays significant roles in history and society, study about religion is essential to understanding both the national and the world. Omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant. Failure to understand event he basic symbols, practices, and concepts of the various religions make much of history, literature, art, and contemporary life unintelligible.

In the context of school as a social space, we should approach the notion of symbolic interaction and looking at how school environment being constructed through school tradition, symbols placed at school or used by students and teachers to transmit certain ideas, and how do the social groups at school learn from other learn about other in terms of religion even though the school culture is dominated by a certain religious tradition. Within this context, the notion of learning from and learning about will be the fundamental pedagogy approach to see the process of interaction in which students should learn about their religion but they will also have opportunities to learn from other religions. Through the notion of learning from and learning about, student will be able to know other religious traditions through their interactions, learning from their friends and teachers[24]. *Learning about* religion can be understood as the knowledge base of religious education: developing an awareness of religions and religious ideas, and an understanding of religious language, terminology and concepts. *Learning from* religion can be understood as the affective or values dimension of religious learning: being able to reflect on ideas and to discuss and evaluate them, developing attitudes, making judgements, and listening to the views of others

Cooperative effort on the part of the home, community, church and school and within these institutions, as well as the cooperative efforts of their members should organized so as to suggest desirable directions of conduct to moral and spiritual values. Moral-spiritual values are potentially present in every personal experience, and are not effectively presented as abstract generalizations about virtues. Maturation is the goal of the individual life. Each one should strive, and be urged to strive, to achieve the fullness of his potentialities.

And how should students be taught about religion? The school may sponsor study about religion, but may not sponsor the practice of religion. The school's approach to religion is academic, not devotional. The school may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not impose any particular view. The school may educate about all religion, but may not promote or denigrate any religion and that is, students must be taught neutrally[25].

It can be argued that by leaving religion out of textbooks and the curriculum, public education marginalizes religion in the minds of adolescents or students and contributes to the growing secularization of culture. An education that leaves religion out of the curriculum is parochial, even discriminatory. Taking religion seriously in the curriculum should not be seen simply as a matter of special pleading on the part of religious groups; it is required by a good education.

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[23] Tia, Teofil, „Biserica Ortodoxă Română şi Întegrarea Europeană- reflexii, analize, problematizări ", ("The Romanian Orthodox Church and the European Integration-Reflexions, Analyses, Investigations") în revista *Reîntregirea,* Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 21.

[24] Grimmitt, Michael, *Pedagogies at Religious Education; Case Studies in the Research Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE. England*, McCrimmon Publishing.Co.LTD, 2000, accessed on http://papers.iafor.org/papers/ace2015/ACE2015_17535.pdf

[25] North Carolina Council of Churches**,** *The Role of Religion in Public Education,* May 7, 1998, accessed on https://www.ncchurches.org/1998/05/the-role-of-religion-in-public-education/

Religious communication and education seeks, over time, to teach adolescents how to explore and understand religion in its various expressions, to develop an awareness of religious language and religious practices, to explore the links between religious belief, ethical or moral issues and shared human values, to understand how religion can be a powerful influence, positively or negatively, on people's lives, individually and in communities, to value and respect religious diversity and to learn how to live with it in a shared society, to be aware of the importance of feelings and emotions in religion, to develop an understanding of spirituality and to develop skills in discussing religious and ethical or moral issues. Therefore, the general purposes of religious communication and education could be seen as helping children, over their time at school, to develop: awareness (having some knowledge about religion), understanding (over time and with maturity), sensitivity (to a range of people's beliefs and feelings), respect (for differing religious traditions and ideas), openness (to the possibility of new ideas) and reflection and critical ability (the capacity to evaluate and discuss religious ideas)[26].

School has a shared responsibility in developing moral-spiritual values. Public or private schools generally believe in, accept and support religion and religious institutions, respecting all religious beliefs. Schools recognize religion as one of the great forces of civilization. Churches and schools are coordinate institutions, each having its separate responsibility for the education of adolescents. Since they share many objectives, however, they should be cooperating and complementary.

We are particularly concerned that the current emphasis in education on technology, computers, economics, and vocationalism can, if not moderated, exacerbate the superficiality and spiritual vacuity of modern culture, distracting students, their parents, and educators from those deeper moral and spiritual domains of life that a good education must address.

A moral-spiritual value is always positive and, among other things, adds to the dignity, beauty, growth, happiness, and security of adolescents. Whether a value at a given moment is moral or spiritual depends upon the quality: the richness, depth, and intensity of the experiences that are producing it or being received from it. The acceptance or rejection of these values provides a basis for determining right thought and action. These values are the substance of the "good" life. "Moral-spiritual values" is a comprehensive term. In order to define it we will say that every attribute of God: truth, life, knowledge, light, beauty, strength, courage, dignity, love, principle, is such a value[27].

Religious faith proves essential in setting a goal and in shaping desires, aspirations, thoughts and actions of people. For many young people who do not refuse religious experience and communication and seek to know the grounds of the faith values, religion and spirituality prove to be important sources of hope, ideals and life models that can influence the development of their identity in the adolescence.

Human education is rooted in the creation of the world. The education work of humanity conceived and accomplished by the providence through the Son of God Incarnate, brings to the human tasks the responsibility of the spiritual growth[28]. The beneficial effects of religious communication as a set of measures systematically applied to the man's skills and abilities training and development, have always been present, since the ancient times humanity providing children and young people, from a very early age, methods of cultivation, training and education. By acquiring religious communication effects there can be cultivated

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[26] *Religious Education in Primary Schools*, Non-statutory guidance materials, published by The Religious Education Advisory Group and CCEA, a CCEA Publication, 2014, p.6

[27] Brubacher, John S. (editor), *The Public Schools and Spiritual Values*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1944, p. 7

[28] Buchiu, Ștefan, „Fundamentul teologic-antropologic al educației creștine în teologia Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur", ("Theological and Anthropological Fundament of Christian Education in the Theology of St. John Chrysostom"), în revista *Ortodoxia*, nr. 4, 2015, p. 25.

even those negative impulses, provided that each part of the soul should be educated or formed in an adequate way: the rational or logical side should be formed by prayer, the volitional side-by the self-control of personal impulses, and the anger part-by learning the art of love and fear of God.

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