**Religious education in conditions of socio-cultural changes**

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Rapidly progressing socio-cultural changes require students to have multi-faceted knowledge to understand their own existence. The term "religious education" captures the phenomenon of teaching and learning based on religious sources in the structure of school education. An important element that includes religious education in the process of general education is the axiological level. The process of religious education aims to discover the beauty of the student as a person and listen to his needs and help him find not only his place in social life, but also accompany him in discovering his personal vocation through gradual approach to human and Christian maturity. The task of religious education is to develop competences in independent interpretation of existence based on religious and general cultural sources.

1. **The need for education in the school education process**

The Holy Father John Paul II emphasized that young people "are the future of the world, they are the future of the nation and the Church, (...) they are the future based on the family, on the school, on the Church, on the nation. Therefore (...) school "by virtue of its mission shapes mental faculties, develops the ability to make correct judgments, introduces us to the heritage of culture created by past generations, develops a sense of values, prepares for professional life, favors the disposition to understand each other, creating friendly coexistence among pupils who differ in character or origin. In the Declaration on Christian Education of the Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum educationis, we read: "education aims to shape the human person towards his ultimate goal and, at the same time, towards the good of society (...)" (No. 1). In this sense, education is "help provided to a person in realizing his humanity, in giving a person's life a final meaning, generally understood as the union of a person with God through the practice of love for one's neighbor" (No. 2).

Christian education should be considered as a process of harmonious unity of natural and supernatural elements. However, from the secular point of view, education is a purposeful and conscious pedagogical activity aimed at achieving the physical, mental, social and cultural development of a human being. Education is the "birth" of a person in the spiritual sense, because it is "the bestowal of humanity". Parents not only give birth to the child's body, but also give birth to the whole person, shape the human person, give birth to his spirit, shape humanity and personality through upbringing (cf. Gravissimum educationis, 2). Upbringing is based on the educational relationship between the student and the teacher, the aim of which is to induce intended changes in the student's personality.

The Holy Father John Paul II, on June 2, 1980, at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, said: "Education is about making a person become more and more human." This is achieved through its comprehensive and harmonious development: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, religious and moral. The aim of education is to direct the student towards values ​​such as truth, goodness and beauty. Since their source is God, who is the Supreme Good, Truth and Beauty, in Christian education it is important that the student puts God in the Holy Trinity in the first place, and thus grows in faith, hope and love as well as moral virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Church documents emphasize the human right to human and Christian education. The Declaration on Christian Education Gravissimum educationis states that a special educational responsibility belongs to the Church, because it is to show all people the paths of salvation, and to impart Christ's life to believers and support them with constant care so that they can achieve the fullness of life (cf. Gravissimum educationis, 1).

**2. Specificity of religious education at school**

The goal of religious education is the comprehensive development of a person, which can be achieved through "a 'total of interactions' aimed at acquiring competences in interpreting everyday life based on religious content". It follows that religious education, in addition to transmitting theoretical knowledge, also helps a person shape his attitudes and develop his spiritual life, in accordance with his religious affiliation. Religious education "takes place in the socio-cultural and religious space (...) as both a social and individual practice". It is therefore of a relational nature, which is why it can be implemented in various ways, that is, it can take the form of formal, non-formal and informal education. In many countries, it is part of the formal education system, most often manifested in the form of school religion classes.

Religious formation covers a person's entire life. Teaching religion at school is intended to help believing students better understand the Christian message in relation to existential problems characteristic of every human being, especially the main moral problems. Students who seek or experience religious doubts should be given the opportunity to discover what faith in Jesus Christ actually means through school catechesis. For non-believing students, this teaching takes on the characteristics of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel, i.e. leading to faith (cf. DOK 75). Religious education, based on biblical and theological foundations, is to include activities enabling a person's comprehensive development, allowing him to perceive the existential dimension of religion and its importance for the quality of everyday life. Through education, the aim is to help the student take the right place in the world around him and take on tasks towards the community in which he lives. However, religious education - thanks to the possibility of showing the religious sense and meaning of the discovered and learned reality - has a wider scope and richer motivational possibilities. Faith broadens the horizons of looking at the surrounding reality and motivates us to act.

**3. Benefits of religious education**

Religious education contributes to better functioning of both an individual and a religious community, and even the entire society. Its fruits may be primarily: spiritual development, shaping morality, a source of social support, understanding cultural diversity, motivation for altruism and charity, or strengthening family ties. Religious education helps in a person's spiritual development, enabling him to understand the truths of the Christian faith and universal values, finding the meaning of life and inner peace, satisfying his spiritual needs, and, above all, giving him the opportunity to deepen his relationship with God and his neighbors. It is not only the transfer of theoretical knowledge, but also the formation of conscience in accordance with moral and ethical principles arising from universal and Christian values. Moreover, religious education influences the building of social bonds and strengthens the sense of belonging to a community, making people sensitive to the needs of their neighbors, especially the weakest ones, according to the words of St. John Paul II: "so that man (...) knows how to "be" more not only with "others", but also "for others". Therefore, it should encourage him to engage in practices of mercy, altruism and charity. Therefore, it is extremely important that the relationships between members of the Church community are correct, full of love, respect, empathy and understanding. For a Christian family, religious education is an integral part of life, enabling the strengthening of bonds within it. Religious education enables understanding and respect for other faiths, cultures and religious traditions by encouraging the building of relationships between different social groups.

**4. Conclusions resulting from conducting religious education at school**

1. Religious education has an educational and cultural dimension. It addresses the issues of the value of human life, discovering a life path, both personal and professional, understanding the modern world and important problems affecting contemporary young people, such as depression, self-harm or suicide attempts, coping with stressful situations, positive conflict resolution, counteracting violence, aggression and various addictions.
2. The process of religious education is focused on a personalistic vision of man, society, and the Church. The idea of ​​religious education is aimed at building in students an attitude of brotherhood, dialogue, cooperation and broadly understood empathy.
3. The goals of religious education are consistent with the Decalogue and universal, timeless values ​​in the name of which it is worth educating. The main goal is the multilateral development of the student, i.e. development in the intellectual, mental, social, health, aesthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions.
4. Religious education talks about building appropriate social attitudes, as well as practical actions that should be undertaken by children and young people.
5. Religious education at school is important for the comprehensive development of students, and knowledge about Christianity is necessary to understand European culture and the culture of many countries on all continents.