

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

REV. BIGHIU GICĂ*¹

gicabighiu@gmail.com

Abstract: *The subject of religious education in schools may appear antiquated or even controversial within contemporary secular societies. In Romania, this subject has been debated extensively since the 1989 Revolution, initially as a resuscitation of Christian values after the communist period and later, especially between 2015 and 2018, in discussions concerning the role and legitimacy of Religion as a school discipline. Although public debate has subsided, the issue remains relevant in the context of ongoing educational reform. This article does not aim to provide a technical pedagogical analysis, but rather to highlight several spiritual and moral arguments that support the study of Religion in schools. It is intended as a reflective and accessible contribution, addressed not only to specialists, but to a broader audience, drawing upon both scholarly sources and the author's experience as a teacher of Religion and as a priest.*

Keywords: *education and culture; religious education; educational system; arguments for studying religion; Christianity and cultural heritage*

A. Introduction.

In considering the intersection of education and culture – understood here as the cultivation of the soul – it is instructive to reference the **Parable of the Sower** as recounted in the Gospel according to Matthew (13:3–23)¹. This parable articulates a tripartite interpretive schema that will inform the present analysis: first, the *soil*, which requires deliberate cultivation; second, the *seed*, conceptualized as the message or language (*kerygma*, κήρυγμα); and third, the *circumstances and modalities* through which the seed is sown in receptive ground. The choice of this parable is motivated not by homiletic intent, but by the recognition, from a pedagogical standpoint, of Jesus Christ as the paradigmatic Teacher or Teacher *par excellence*. Christ is not merely a conveyor of epistemic content, but rather a Being who communicates Himself ontologically to those receptive to His

* Missionary priest at the chapel Saint Demetrius the New of Basarabia, Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University (since Dec. 2021).

¹ Holy Bible, King James Version, Giant Print Reference Edition, Regency Publishing House, Nashville/New York, 1976, pp.1417-1418.

message. In this regard, He transcends the status of knowledge and is encountered as a Person. This study is grounded in this foundational paradigm.

Moreover, one of humanity's most elevated vocations – distinct from its role as priest of creation – is the pedagogical mission, construed as the transmission of knowledge and wisdom from one person to another. This process of transmission constitutes a profound interpersonal encounter, which, within the framework of Christian anthropology, culminates in the encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ. Christian anthropology posits that human beings are created after God's *image* – not in terms of physical resemblance, but in faculties such as *rationality*, *affectivity*, and *volition* – which collectively comprise the divine imprint upon the human soul. This *imago* is inherently dynamic, oriented toward increasing conformity or likeness with God, the Archetype of humanity. The progression toward this *likeness* is realized through education, moral formation, and spiritual cultivation, which collectively confer both existential meaning and the prospect of salvation.

The interdependence between faith² and human reason³ enables religion to be understood as a free, conscious, and personal relationship between human beings and God (*religio*, meaning "to bind together")⁴. Human reason is not only an instrument of scientific progress and material development, but also the essential condition for interpersonal encounter and the sharing of knowledge. Personality itself is shaped through education, effort, and the cultivation of virtues, in the continual aspiration toward likeness with the divine Archetype.

In this formative process, the teacher of religion plays a decisive role. As a pedagogue, the teacher does not merely transmit information, but also communicates values, character, and personal example. The teacher thus becomes responsible for the moral and spiritual formation of students

² According to Saint Paul, *the faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1), see Holy Bible, p.1768.

³ The first father of Christian Church who explains and debates on the *human reason* planted by God is *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite*, but most famous father who develops and traces a new direction by speaking of the reasonability of mankind and creation toward the divine reason is *Saint Maximus the Confessor*. In our days, especially in Romanian Orthodoxy, *Saint Dumitru Stăniloae* develops the thinking of *plastic reasons* of creation linked by the Divine reason or Logos.

⁴ Sebastian Şebu, Monica Opreş, Dorin Opreş, *Religion Teaching Methodology*, Reunification Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2017, p.21.

and for their integration into society. Similarly, religion as a school subject is centered on the human person in relationship – relationship with God, with others, and with creation. Religion invites dialogue, a dialogue initiated by God and extended among human beings and the whole of creation.

B. Arguments for the study of Religion in School⁵.

In addition to researching the argumentation on the study of religion in the school, I bear in mind the figure of my grandmother, as a saint, who has provided me with a testimony about what the religion class looked like before the Second World War. I was very captivated by that perspective, and although the context is quite different, I consider that there is one actual topic that stands in Romanian educational system. Therefore, I was inspired by the article from above, developed its framework, fulfilled the points, and seek to update it to our context⁶.

1) The first argument derives from European cultural heritage, which recognizes that

Christianity is an integral and defining component of European civilization⁷. European history and identity are deeply rooted in Christian thought, values, and institutions. Despite historical moments of conflict or misuse of religion, Christianity remains a **key** to understand European culture⁸. **The presence of religious education in many European**

⁵ The research is based on 10 reasons or motifs debated for including the discipline of religion in Educational system, (according to the article published by Basilica and accessed on 09.12.2025, <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>).

⁶ One of the most fecund voices in the study of Religion is the professor **Constantin Cuceș**. One of his most representative works is *Religious Education. Theoretical and Methodological Highlights*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1999, a book that inspired me during my journey.

⁷ Pr. lect. PhD. Gheorghe Holbea, Pr. lect. PhD. Dorin Opreș, Lect. PhD. Monica Opreș, Diac. George Jambore, *Education Apostolate-Religion Class-Knowledge and Spiritual Development*, Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 2010. In his book, *The Christian Europe*, Joseph Weiler underlines, *in the actual European constitutional context, that the references to God and Christianity must not be forget, on the contrary, they are indispensable* (English translation p.19).

⁸ Pr. lect. PhD. Gheorghe Holbea... In his book, *The Christian Europe*, Joseph Weiler underlines, *in the actual European constitutional context, that the references to God and Christianity must not be forget, on the contrary, they are indispensable* (English translation p.19 apud Holbea...).

educational systems today testifies to this enduring legacy. I can bring up a case study. As long as I have been living in Denmark, despite secularization of society, at least in primary school, the curriculum ensured two hours of teaching religion every week.

2) Young people possess a constitutional right to religious education, a right reaffirmed in Romania after the 1989 Revolution, which restored freedom of conscience and spiritual expression⁹. The younger are often driven by profound existential questions, and religious education provides a framework in which such questions may be addressed meaningfully. I can certify that through my pastoral experience, either in Romania or in my mission from Denmark. The young people are ready to sacrifice everything to achieve their goals, not only from a professional perspective but also from a spiritual one.

3) Religion presents life as a gift from God and offers a worldview that promotes values such as family, hospitality, justice, peace, solidarity, tolerance, and communion. Creation itself, marked by rationality, may be perceived like an open book revealing divine providence¹⁰. In this context, the teacher of Religion acts as a mediator, fostering awareness of responsibility toward life, health, and the natural environment. At the same time, the pupil is not a passive element; on the contrary, he or she becomes aware of the cultivation of the gifts from God, sometimes even through the example of the teacher.

4) Faith represents one of the most important spiritual legacies transmitted through family, Church, school, and community. Religious education, freely embraced, helps young people distinguish between enduring and transient values, shaping character and moral responsibility¹¹. This process involves a synergistic collaboration among family, school, and Church, without coercion or indoctrination¹², but

⁹ <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² The religious education does not mean the *brainwashing*, neither enforces one through foreign laws, on the contrary, as **His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Orthodox Romanian Church**, observes, *our Lord, Jesus Christ proposes not forces, recommends not orders the life-changing; He calls rather constrains; He fascinates not fanaticizes,*

through invitation and personal freedom. Thus, the family is the first place where a child must receive primary religious knowledge¹³.

5) Religious education must be understood within the broader curricular context¹⁴. It contributes to the holistic formation of the human person by cultivating the innate human disposition toward religiosity through pedagogical principles and methods¹⁵. Its foundations are human reason and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, which offers a paradigm of participation in eternal life. According to the scholar Constantin Cucuș¹⁶, religious education should not be monopolized by either ecclesiastical or secular institutions, but should emerge from their collaboration. He distinguishes between religious *instruction* and religious *education*, the former being theoretical and institutional, and the latter formative and character-building. Rather than functioning as an ancillary discipline, religious education should coexist within an integrated curriculum that acknowledges the value and interrelation of all disciplines. Therefore, Constantin Cucuș proposes a **common curriculum**, without separation between *religious* and *secular*, with recognition of the values of every discipline and their relationship. *The constitutive elements of the curriculum must be congruent and axiologically articulated*¹⁷.

6) Religious education carries significant formative potential, as demonstrated by educational and sociological studies. It contributes to addressing identity crises and moral disorientation by offering meaningful models of holiness and human coexistence¹⁸. In a society increasingly shaped by technological development and individualism, authentic moral

He advises but not press any soul by searching after Him (according to his book, *The Gospel of the Glory of Christ, Sermons on Sundays throughout the year*, Basilica Publishing House of the Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 2016, p.333 (our translation).

¹³ Prof. Ana Danciu, *Religion Teaching Methodology in primary, secondary and high schools*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 251 (our translation).

¹⁴ <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>.

¹⁵ Pr. lect. PhD. Gheorghe Holbea, Pr. lect. dr. Dorin Opreș, Lect. dr. Monica Opreș, Diac. George Jambore... p.24.

¹⁶ Constantin Cucuș, see above, p.16.

¹⁷ Constantin Cucuș, work cited, p.25.

¹⁸ <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>.

paradigms are essential for younger¹⁹. Today, humanity becomes lonely and autonomous, attempting to solve the problems on its own. Our students are challenged today to the concentric attacks: the democracy perceived as libertinage, leading to alcoholism and drugs, delinquency or pornography, robbery and even crime. All of us are called to solve any case, offer solutions and bring them to the right path. Otherwise, the religion class would be an *instruction* class, providing them with knowledge quickly forgotten²⁰.

7) Another important function of religious education is the reduction of religious ignorance, which often leads to intolerance, fanaticism, or radicalization. By fostering informed understanding, religious education can prevent deviant religious behaviors and promote social cohesion. In our times, when distorted information could even kill, religious education can make a difference between truth and lies, between good and evil. Being familiar with the religious realities, we will not be able to judge others at all. Instead of emphasizing the differences between us, we should emphasize what unites us.

8) Religious education contributes to the cultivation of awareness regarding the intrinsic dignity and eternal value of the human person²¹. It reinforces moral values rooted in history and tradition by emphasizes education as a lifelong process, first in family, continued in school, completed in Church and society²². It is worth remembering the journey of the human reason in its aspiration to the salvation of the soul. Since the beginning of its existence, humankind questioned the universe about how to handle it in order to achieve salvation, whatever it means. Looking back, religious education starts in the bosom of the family, continues in the school and society and is fulfilled in the Church. It is never-ending, because the *image* of God is always in a dynamic perspective, in order to achieve the likeness to God.

¹⁹ Prof. Ana Danciu, *Religion Teaching Methodology in primary, secondary and high schools*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 251 (our translation).

²⁰ Idem, p.253.

²¹ <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>.

²² Ibidem.

9) Since freedom is a fundamental gift, religious education must be freely chosen by parents and pupils²³. Such freedom does not imply indifference, but rather the capacity to select values that enrich human life. Religious education supports this responsible exercise of freedom. One should observe the difference between freedom and libertinism or libertinage, as I mentioned above. First is a coordinate or a feature of God's *face*, while the second is the misuse of the intellectual faculties in order to seek autonomy and one's own desire.

10) Religious denominations in Romania seek closer cooperation with the State in promoting an education that integrates spiritual depth with intellectual formation. In a technologically advanced society, the absence of spiritual meaning can have detrimental effects on young people's orientation and well-being²⁴. Education must therefore address both body and soul.

C. Conclusion.

Considering Romania's Christian heritage, European cultural legacy, and contemporary social challenges, the study of Religion within the educational system remains both relevant and necessary. The arguments presented here aim to highlight the dignity, beauty, and uniqueness of the human person, who possesses not only an immanent but also a transcendent vocation. Religious education can play a vital role in helping individuals respond responsibly to this vocation, nurturing care for the soul, creation, and the relationship with God. The freedom and vocation for this value represent the highest coordinate, which enables the modeling of characters, so that the pupils can always embrace the good and stay away from evil. Moreover, by cultivating a relationship with God and nature, humankind becomes aware of the need to care for the environment and also pay attention to the relationship with fellow people. Finally we need to understand that the universe is a gift from God, which, together with our reason must be cultivated and bequeathed to those who will come after us.

The study or teaching Religion in schools is a high responsibility and a guarantee for our future and how we will answer to God, to our own conscience and to our fellows.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

REFERENCES:

The Holy Bible, King James Version, (1976), New York: Regency Publishing House, Giant Print Reference Edition.

Cucoș, Constantin, (1999), *Religious Education. Theoretical and Methodological Highlights*, Iași: Polirom Publishing House.

Danciu, Ana, (1999), *Religion Teaching Methodology in primary, secondary and high schools*, Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House.

Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, (2016), *The Gospel of the Glory of Christ, Sermons on Sundays throughout the year*, Bucharest: Basilica Publishing House.

Holbea, Pr., Gheorghe; Opreș, Pr., Dorin; Opreș, Monica; Jambore, Diac., George, (2010), *Education Apostolate-Religion Class-Knowledge and Spiritual Development*, Bucharest: Basilica Publishing House.

Șebu, Sebastian; Opreș, Monica; Opreș, Dorin (2017), *Religion Teaching Methodology*, Alba Iulia: Reunification Publishing House.

The article <https://basilica.ro/lumina-pentru-viata-importanta-orei-de-religie-pentru-educatia-copiilor-si-tinerilor/>.