

Modern means of children catechism in the Romanian Church and School.

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Summary.

The young people today have the chance to be familiarized with the reality they live in and not with the illusory world the TV and the computer offer them. The project „Christ shared to the children” helps them better see these things. They have the chance to know themselves, with their skills and deficiencies and it will help them transform their inner and spiritual life and form their personality. Through this catechetical project, the Church tries to offer answers to the questions the children have with regards to eternal life and also aims at helping them make a career in this material life.

The executive director Cătălin Andrew Popa of World Vision Romania mentioned during the closing festivity of the project in 2013 that „Choose School! is a very good example that shows us what it can be done when the Church, the society and the State work together for the well fare of the child” and the Minister of Education, Remus Pricopie, underlined that ”this project is super strategic.” In the same context, the managing director of POSDRU, Mrs. Ella Ștefan pointed out that ”you have managed to touch more than half of the targets Romania assumed for this period”; this means that out of the 54000 pupils and 6000 adults, which have been part of the 80 projects that aimed to reduce early school drop-out, 35000 pupils and 3206 priests and teachers have been part of the project ”Choose School!”.

Keywords:

curricular area, catechism methods, religious education, educational projects, school dropout.

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The project "Christ shared to the children"

Ever since the Romanians have become a social group in history, they have cherished the education of the mind with all the values and benefits it provides, but especially the cultivation of the spirit through religious education, which gives the man the status of crown of creation and guarantees its eternal existence. Education and faith can be seen as a whole at the Romanians and the evidence in this sense is countless since the oldest times. The great historian N. Iorga states that the Romanians used the term "school" long before the official schools existed,² which demonstrates their preoccupations for culture and progress; the first schools have appeared within the monasteries and on the porch of the parish churches.

Regardless of the political regimes that occurred in Romania, they have all supported the education of the mind through school and of the soul through the Church, except for the communist regime, which legislated free education in schools in Romania, but forbade the teaching of Religious Education in school starting with the year 1948; the pastoral-missionary activity of the Church was severely restricted and carefully monitored as well. The fact that, paradoxically, Law no. 2/1972, which obliges individuals and institutions to pursue or organize various forms of permanent education, has not been abrogated to date,³ it demonstrates the favourable aspect of the legislation on permanent education in Romania.

After 1989, the Ministry of Education resumes the tradition of combining scientific and religious education in the Romanian School, for all branches of pre-university education and for all recognized religions in Romania, reasoning that lacking young people of religious education means assaulting their souls. Educating only the intellect in young people without insisting on the spiritual formation through religious education, resemble the situation of building a house of bricks without using lime or cement in between the bricks.⁴

Right after the Communist regime fell, the Romanian Orthodox Church quickly organized and sent their priests to teach "Moral-Religious Education" in schools; until 1991 children had a class of Moral- Religious Education every two weeks and from then on it was included in the curriculum as a class per week. In 1992, it becomes compulsory for the primary school and optional for secondary school and high school. In 1993 it has been named "Religious Education", being more relevant. Starting with 1994, the analytical curriculum was revised and supplemented with didactic methodologies. Several religion textbooks have been printed during these years and

² Nicolae Iorga, *The History of the Romanian Education*, Bucharest, 1928, p. 1-3.

³ Collective authors, *Permanent development of the Romanian Education*, Alternative Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 8.

⁴ Pr. lecturer Miron Erdei, *Concerns about teaching religion in school*, in "The Theological Magazine", Sibiu, no. 2-3, 1998, p. 132.

the first handbook for the 4th grade appears in 1995. All the schools in Romania introduced the Religious Education Class in their timetables with no objections coming from the teachers or the school managers. In 1995, the Faculties of Theology completed the training of 5632 graduates as priests and teachers all over the country. They are the trainers of characters of our country who, over the past 25 years, have honoured the institutions they have been educated in, proving their vocation and professionalism. Some of them became school inspectors, school managers and members of various education boards.⁵

The success of religious education in Romania is also due to the parents who have chosen for their children to attend the Religious Education classes.⁶ The merit of this attitude is that of the communist priests who, despite restrictive measures with regards to the religious education, planted in the souls of future parents the seed of faith and the balance of Christian morality, relying on the fact that the education of a child begins 18 years before it is born. The results of the religious education in the Communist era began to appear in December 1989, after 40 years of atheist education, when all those young people who were in front of tanks and soldiers trained to fire cried out in a voice: "May God be with us!".

1. The legislative framework of religious education in Romania

Under the provisions of Art. 18 of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments, "the framework plans for primary, secondary, high school and vocational education include Religious Education as a school discipline, part of the common trunk".⁷

According to the order issued by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research on the approval of the "Methodology of organizing the teaching of Religion in pre-university education", starting with the academic year 2015-2016, the students that have the religious cults recognised by the state are guaranteed the right to participate in Religious Education classes regardless of their number. If students do not attend Religious Education class, their school situation is concluded without this discipline. In order to be able to participate in the Religious Education class, the parents of minors or older children should request this option in writing, specifying the name of the requested cult. If there are applications registered for several cults, the manager of the educational unit will group students corresponding to the cults they applied for. If the number of applications is too small and does not allow the teaching

⁵ See details in priest lecturer Miron Erdei, *op. cit.* p. 133-134.

⁶ Dan Ciachir, *Law on Education and Religion*, in the journal. "Renaissance", no. 7-8, 1995, p. 3.

⁷ Law no. 1 of January 5th 2011 of the National Education, Issuer: Parliament, published in the "Official Gazette" no. 18 of January 10th /2011.

of Religious Education for a particular cult, pupils can study this discipline in their own cult and the absences and grades will be transmitted in writing to the educational unit or to the class teacher.⁸

The main purpose of the Religious Education class is to shape the character and the personality of the pupils, according to the religious-moral precepts of the gospel of Christ and their application in the personal life and that of the community. The Religious Education class also has a social-cultural purpose, meant to solidify the European community through mutual knowledge of cultural values and respect for everyone's identity, which ensures the avoidance of religious and social tensions.

The EU States include Religious Education in their national curriculum, with an emphasis on activities aimed to encourage peace cultivation by promoting the religious, spiritual and moral-civic values of the old European continent.⁹

The school curriculum for Religious Education (for all cults) is a curricular offer for pre-university education. It appears in the framework plans of the "Human and Society" curriculum with a class/ week during a school year, according to the "Educational Framework for Gymnasium" approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research no. 3590 from 05.04.2016. The Order of the Minister of National Education no. 3393 from 28.02.2017 approved the school curricula of Religious Education for the 5th and 8th grades as it follows:

17.Religious Education – 7th Day Adventist Church, 5th and 8th grades

18.Religious Education – Baptist Church, 5th and 8th grades

19.Religious Education – Plymouth Brethren, 5th and 8th grades

20.Religious Education– The Evangelical CA Cult, 5th and 8th grades

21.Religious Education – Greek Byzantine Catholic Church, 5th and 8th grades

22.Religious Education – Muslim Cult, 5th and 8th grades

23.Religious Education – Orthodox Church, 5th and 8th grades

24.Religious Education – Old Calendars Orthodox Church, 5th and 8th grades

25.Religious Education – Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 5th and 8th grades

26.Religious Education – Pentecostalism, 5th and 8th grades

27.Religious Education – Continental Reformed Church , 5th and 8th grades

28.Religious Education – Continental Reformed Church, 5th and 8th grades a,

Hungarian version

29.Religious Education – Latin Church(Romanian version), 5th and 8th grades

30.Religious Education – Latin Church (Hungarian version)5th and 8th grades

⁸ Order no. 5232 of September 14th 2015 on the approval of the Methodology for organizing the teaching of the Religion in pre-university education, I, II, III, IV, Issuer: Minister of Education and Scientific Research, published in "Monitorul Oficial", no. 720 of September 24th, 2015.

⁹ *Religion, Man and society* 2017-2018, p. 1

31. Religious Education –Unitarian Church, 5th and 8th grades

The school curriculum proposes a set of common elements for all cults in Romania who have the right to teach their own religion in the education system and seeks to provide a coherent framework for teaching Religious Education: a list of general competences, specific competencies, a series of examples of activities and the general part of methodological suggestions.

The new Religious Education curricula also contain innovative elements that consist of "inviting teachers to freely design their own lessons, organizing/reorganizing the contents/ case studies outlined in the curriculum, according to the logic of the individual didactic approach and their suitability to the specific competencies targeted at pupil's development".¹⁰ The teachers are also required to use the content and the case studies from the perspective of moral and civic education as well.

The curriculum also aims to develop the general competencies of interculturality (where religious diversity plays an important role with regard to human rights, without harming the dignity of any human being), to raise awareness of diversity, to develop the ability to communicate and engage in dialogue with peers and live with the others, to work in a team, to learn through cooperation and to solve conflicts peacefully; all of the above mentioned increase self-esteem and the possibility of knowing other faiths.

2. Modern means of catechism in the Romanian Church and school

2.1. The Catechetical Project „Christ shared to the children”

World Vision Romania and The Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina started a project entitled “Christ shared to the children”, based on principles that define society as a living community in which children and young people get both intellectual knowledge and fundamental values for the development of Christian faith and culture. Following the decision of the Holy Synod 4508/2005, the project “Christ shared to the children” was taken over by the Romanian Patriarchate, becoming the official project of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 2008. The purpose of this project „is to provide the priests and catechists methods to offer the children biblical teachings from the earliest age and help them get to maturity in faith; they also wanted to organize the "Sunday School" at parish level as a solution to develop an authentic moral profile rooted in the Christian system of values”.¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹¹ Priest Dr. Naclad Constantin, *Choose School! - National project for the future of children*, in vol. "The catechetical and homiletic ministry of the Holy Church for the religious education of the Orthodox youth – history and present. St. Mc. Antim Ivireanul, Metropolitan of Wallachia, model of education through culture", Bibliotheca Publishing House, ISBN 978-606-772-144-7, Târgoviște, 2016, p.71.

The main objectives of this project are to edit and publish "Biblical catechesis guides" for children between 6-17 years of age, accompanied by the "Catechism Guide", both being distributed and used in the catechization of each parish of the Romanian Orthodox Church, followed by the preparation of priests and catechists for the use of these guidelines and a plan of organizing catechetical activity in each parish. All these were accomplished through an organizational and financial effort by the project manager priest Dr. Naclad Constantin, closely assisted by a technical team of professionals who organized a series of national and international activities during 2006-2008: 123 training sessions, 15 launching events of the project, 14 promotional events of the project and 11 meetings with university professors who teach Catechism.¹² This innovative educational project has led to the establishment of the catechetical department at the level of the Romanian Patriarchy, of catechesis offices within each bishopric and implicitly the revival and modernization of the catechetical education in the parish.

In order to make the religious education of the children included in this project more effective, the priests and teachers of Religious Education use a series of classical methodologies combined with modern and even innovative ones to respond to the new secular challenges of the early 21st century. We mention some aspects and concrete examples as follows:

a. By setting up catechetical groups by age group and promoting group catechesis, the program „Christ shared to the children” becomes an important factor in influencing the child's personality and developing the community-ecclesial sense and „imposes a new catechetical, hristocentric and pnevmatized vision, which aims at the theological information and also at helping the adolescent to become a clerical person”.¹³

b. The catechetical guides and catechesis themselves are made up in a language accessible to the perceptual level of each age, ranging from 6 to 17 years. The priest or the teacher should always keep in mind the possibilities of young people to assimilate the information, their family environment, their level of previous education and their intellectual capacity, by always applying the psychological principle or that of accessibility; this will limit the information and will organize the material to be taught

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 72.

¹³ PhD priest Sorin Lungoci, *The catechism of adolescents through the catechetic project „Christ shared to the children”*, in vol. "The catechetical and homiletic ministry of the Holly Church for the religious Education of the Orthodox youth – history and present. St. Mc. Antim Ivireanul, Metropolitan of Wallachia, model of education through culture", Bibliotheca Publishing House, ISBN 978-606-772-144-7, Târgoviște, 2016, p. 64.

to avoid any negative consequences among students: saturation, overwork, indifference, etc.¹⁴

c. By using new methodologies of teaching religious knowledge in the project, especially those with an active participative character (brainstorming, role play, case study etc.),¹⁵ students have the opportunity to discover the truth through their own investigation activities, which they assimilate easier and accept them as a way of life, because "Religious Education must be affective and awake intense feelings of pleasure, piety, compassion and admiration of God".¹⁶

d. As the project "Christ shared to the children" takes place in the church, the principle of intuition enjoys a maximum of use in the educational process. Intuition is not only used in the strict sense, by seeing or touching iconographic images, but in a broader sense, as well, by using images and stories with the power of suggestion and persuasion of the pupils, that is to say, the teacher approaches the intuition of feelings using the inner intuition, the „communication of the soul feelings which is the most valuable part of all the religious education",¹⁷ says C. A. Teodorescu.

e. The relaxing atmosphere during the class of catechism is particularly important because it occurs in the church, in an environment of godliness, without the typical school boundaries; the teacher receives the children as a parent, who does not teach them anything but offers himself spiritually to the children who have come voluntarily and without being constrained by grades. In such an environment, they feel safe and communicate frankly with their colleagues, they trust the teacher and confess their anxieties, managing to „change characters, shake opinions and mentalities, purify bad habits, train people for better and for beautiful".¹⁸ These are the fruits of an active religious education, which are gathered in the new catechetical program.

f. To do recreational activities young people participate at classes of painting, drawing and graphics, sculpture, folklore, theatre, literature, music, poetry, computer science, contests, auditions and projection of religious films, oratory, tennis, football, volleyball, basketball, depending on the age they have and the interest they have shown towards the above mentioned activities. As a reward for their involvement in

¹⁴ Priest prof. Vasile Gordon, *Introduction in the orthodox catechism*, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 119.

¹⁵ Dorin Opreș, Monica Opreș, *Active methods of teaching and learning. Models and applications to Religion*, Sf. Mina Publishing House, Iași, 2006, p.15.

¹⁶ Nisipeanu Ion, *Religion for children. Learning Religion in the primary school*, Romanian Culture Publishing House, Bucharest, 1924, p.17.

¹⁷ C. A. Teodorescu, *General principles of education applied to religious education*, in "Methodological and teaching guidance for teaching religion in school", Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1990, p. 52.

¹⁸ Constantin Cucuș, *Religious education. Content and forms of achievement*. Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 171.

these creative classes, the parishes organize trips and pilgrimages to visit touristic and religious sights, as well as a series of national competitions, including the Christian Oratory Contest from 2010 "My Creed"¹⁹ and the Contest of mini-projects of social and philanthropic education „Children learn to love Christ” from 2012,²⁰ which was very appreciated by the young people of the Romanian Patriarchy.

2.2 The catechetical project “Choose School!” is a natural sequel of the project „Christ shared to the children”; the participants in this project are children affected by school drop-out because they lack motivation to finish school, because their parents work abroad for long periods of time, because the degree of poverty gets bigger and bigger in the countryside or simply because they lack an ideal of life. In this context, the Orthodox Church noticed the gravity of the situation and got involved by accessing these projects, because „through the spiritual values it promotes, it is a factor that cannot miss from the educational and philanthropic act and it can strengthen the educational motivation in a way that other institutions cannot do it”.²¹ The purpose of this project is to promote Christian values and the load of opportunities education can offer for the moral and professional training of young people. Being a national project, „Choose School!” had four stages and each stage had different areas of implementation.

I. September 2009- June 2012. World Vision Romania in collaboration with the Romanian Patriarchy started the implementation of the project „Choose School!” over a period of 34 months in three regions of the country: North-East, South-Muntenia and Bucharest-Ilfov. The Romanian Patriarch Daniel addressed himself to the students, parents and teachers at the beginning of the school year 2011-2012 saying that „through its educational projects „Christ shared to the children” and „Choose School!”, the Orthodox Church makes many efforts to teach the children in the spirit of love of God and the people, by promoting the prayer, the friendship and helping the others and also prevent school drop-out caused by poverty or by parents who work abroad”.²²

¹⁹ Damian Alexandru Anfile, *Christian Orthodox Contest "My Creed"*, in the journal "Romanian Orthodox Church", no. 2, 2010, p. 34-39.

²⁰ Silviu Dascălu, *National Congres "Christ shared to the children" organized at Caraiman Monastery from Bușteni (September 11-13)*, in the journal "Romanian Orthodox Church", no. 3, 2012, p.42-43.

²¹ Pr. dr. Naclad Constantin, *op. cit.* p. 72.

²² The message of the Romanian Patriarch Daniel, addressed to pupils, parents and their teachers at the beginning of the school year 2011-2012 (September 10th), in the journal "Romanian Orthodox Church", no. 3, 2011, p. 28-29.

II. August 2010 - July 2013, over a period of 36 months, the project "Choose School! 2" was extended in the other five regions of the country: North-West, South-West, South-East, West and Centre, becoming thus a national one. The project was initiated by the Romanian Patriarchy and the Foundation World Vision Romania "to prevent and fight school drop-out and juvenile delinquency, by promoting alternative educational solutions like the Sunday School, being necessary to motivate children aged 6-16 from the city or from the countryside".²³ In these two stages of the project, we had the following performances:

- 247 training sessions were organized;
- 3206 priests and teachers participated in these stages;
- "Sunday School" was organised in each parish community;
- We have registered over 30.000 children as target group;
- We have organised 235 summer camps over a period of three years, in four locations (three children from each location were selected for these summer camps);
- 9618 children participated in „Glimmer of Light” creation camps, which took place at the Social-Pastoral Centre "Sf. Cruce" Caraiman from Bușteni, the Social-Pastoral Centre "Sf. Daniil Sihastrul" from Durău, the Social-Pastoral Centre "Sf. Ilie" from Miclăușeni and the Touristic Complex "Sf. Nicolae" from Tismana working on three workshops: creation, literary-religious workshop and painting.

III. April 2014 - December 2015, over a period of 12 months, we had the project "Choose School" in 3 regions: West, South-West Oltenia and North-West, where we had the following performances:

- 106 priests and teachers participated in these stages;
- 1325 children with risk of school dropout and 318 students who abandoned school took part in these stages;
- We have organised 12 camp sessions;
- A contest with prizes was organized for 318 children who abandoned school.

IV. March 2015 - November 2015, over a period of 9 months, we have organized the project „Choose School" in 4 regions: North-east, Bucharest-Ilfov, South-Muntenia and South-West, from the countryside and the city in pre-university education, from very industrialized areas, with an unemployment rate of over 20%, where the infrastructure and the means of communication are poorly developed. We wanted to achieve many objectives and some of them are listed below:

- The development of activities such as Sunday School/ Summer School for over 750 pupils coming from vulnerable groups, offering them financial support and

²³ Ioan Bușagă, *The National project "Choose School!"*, in the journal "Romanian Orthodox Church", no. 3, 2010, p. 32.

parent counselling in order for them to better understand the importance of education and its role in the children's education;

- Developing a corrective type programme „School after school” for 750 pupils coming from vulnerable groups; they are offered education, private lessons, guidance, counselling and financial support;

- Creating a „Second chance” programme for a period of 5 months to achieve basic competencies and develop personal abilities in the case of 100 children aged under 18 who had abandoned school;

- Organizing two popularization campaigns about the importance of the project and its results, in order to alert the families and the community about the long term risks the social and school non-integration involves.²⁴

3. Conclusions

The young people today have the chance to be familiarized with the reality they live in and not with the illusory world the TV and the computer offer them. The project „Christ shared to the children” helps them better see these things. They have the chance to know themselves, with their skills and deficiencies and it will help them transform their inner and spiritual life and form their personality. Through this catechetical project, the Church tries to offer answers to the questions the children have with regards to eternal life and also aims at helping them make a career in this material life.²⁵

Respecting the healthy pedagogical principles and using modern didactic methodologies, the educators participating in this project didn't wait too much until they saw the results of their activity; children seem to assimilate religious knowledge and get new moral skills easier in this framework.

Because we live in a society with immediate economical interests, without any investments in the eternal moral values, even ethical ones, the young people today may be an easy prey for the hedonistic and cunningly offers of the 21st century. The educational system today emphasizes the informative aspect, neglecting the formative aspect of the children's education. The project „Choose School!” tries to compensate the educational act of young people, taking care of their behaviour and feelings; these two elements are the foundation of spiritual formation and very important for the social and family life. One cannot imagine the children's joy and happiness in these two projects; even their educators were really surprised of their outcome: „We have

²⁴ See details of monitoring and statistical information with regards to the four stages of the project „Choose School!” at the manager of the project priest Dr. Naclad Constantin, *op. cit.* p. 72-77.

²⁵ Priest Iacob Cismaş, *The priest – a missionary in the context of the contemporary world*, Renaissance Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2010, p. 243.

discovered children with incredible life stories, children who have never taken a bus so far, who haven't seen blocks of flats, who were very happy when they touched books or painted iconographic images".²⁶ It is obvious that such unique feelings have a decisive role in the case of a student close to school drop-out.

Along with the spiritual satisfaction of those involved in these projects, we also have appreciations coming from the outside; the two projects have been frequently publicized in the local newspapers and some shows on different TV channels - particularly "Radio and TV Trinitas". The executive director Cătălin Andrew Popa of World Vision Romania mentioned during the closing festivity of the project in 2013 that „Choose School! is a very good example that shows us what it can be done when the Church, the society and the State work together for the well fare of the child”²⁷ and the Minister of Education, Remus Pricopie, underlined that "this project is super strategic." In the same context, the managing director of POSDRU, Mrs. Ella Ștefan pointed out that "you have managed to touch more than half of the targets Romania assumed for this period",²⁸ this means that out of the 54000 pupils and 6000 adults, which have been part of the 80 projects that aimed to reduce early school drop-out, 35000 pupils and 3206 priests and teachers have been part of the project "Choose School!".

We conclude that this national project was carried out on a very large scale in terms of involvement of human resources and absorption of European Funds. The project "Choose School! 2" was co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Sectoral Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, Priority Axis 2, Major Field of Intervention 2.2

The success of this educational achievement is due to the managing director priest Dr. C-tin Naclad and to his team of specialists who have managed to build a national project with the structure of a Swiss watch. The harmonisation of classical and modern methodologies was done by hundreds of coordinators, trainers, social workers and educators who have done all their best for the children they worked with to learn enjoy and want to be children. It is obvious that the biggest satisfaction was of children who learned the joy of being children. We didn't miss the principle of competition either because 33488 pupils got prizes of over 4000000 RON during the contests organized in the four editions of the project.

²⁶ Pr. dr. Naclad Constantin, *op. cit.* p. 79.

²⁷ Ioan Bușagă, *The project "Choose School!" at the end*, in the journal "The Herald of Orthodoxy", no. 7-8, 2023, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 12.