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**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA- ORTHODOXY
AND/OR RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

**(Religious) education in the context of modern demands
for multiculturalism and pluralism**

Tolerance, religious and ideological pluralism, and multiculturalism, have to a great extent become the norm and praxis today, not only the value toward which we strive. For the development of the theory of human rights as well as the economical, political and military supremacy of the countries, which protect this politics (USA, EU), impose the question about the compatibility of religion and praxis of particular religious communities with those principles.

Those principles are in positive correlation and, to some extent, have their origin in postmodernism. Postmodernism has proclaimed the so called end of the grand narratives, meta-theories, and all kinds of maximalism, from which originate some negative consequences, such as intolerance, xenophobia etc. The principle of multiculturalism is similar to them, for, according to the theorist Charles Taylor, instead of honor, as the principle of status societies (where the people are *a priori* unequal), it emphasizes the principle of dignity of man as he is and of the human collectives, which not only have the rights to show their particularities, but also that the others, with whom they live, should allow them and also induce them to nourish their particularities (Taylor, 1993:33). Especially in the conditions of globalization and fast course of information as well as of the people who originate from different cultural and religious backgrounds, the

principles of tolerance, multiculturalism and pluralism have become the demands of time. As the sociologist Djuro Susnjic has said – there is no unique worldview, yet we all must live together (Susnjic, 2003: 97).

Whereas in the developed countries, the stress is laid on ideological pluralism, individualism and religious freedom, in the area of former Yugoslavia there has come about a certain religious revival, but in the form of a turning towards traditionalistic religion, and a creating of new and renewal of old connections between religion and nation, church and the state. This traditionalism leads to placing greater significance on the collective, which one strived to homogenize, and neglecting the principles of individualism and pluralism.

As the topic of this conference is religious education, it must be pointed out that education has and should have two dimensions. On the one hand, it should answer to the needs of society (e.g. to educate the children for certain roles and professions, which are necessary in society, to introduce to them the values, which exist in society- here it must not be forgotten that we live in multi-confessional society, etc). On the other hand, education should enable individual growth and development, and improve the development of free and critical consciousness. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce to the young people the broader and more universal values, which are significant for all mankind and civilization.

As the theorists of functionalism perceived, a great number of values have their origin in religion, so it is logical that courses should be organized where children are introduced to religious matters. However, the problem is how to find a balance between a need to learn more about one's own religion, which was systematically neglected in the period of communism and atheism in these areas, and the need for obtaining broader and humanistic knowledge, as well as knowledge of the religion of those with whom we live. This can create controversies and problems on the practical level, in this case in the field of religious education and its introduction in schools.

Contents of the textbooks for the orthodox religious education in RS

As for the religious education in Republic of Srpska, religious instruction is a subject in elementary school, and in is obligatory and confessional. The subject was introduced in the year 1992., and the program was made by the Orthodox Church, with the explanation that the official ministry of education has no experience in the matter (Milosevic, 2004: 69). I have focused on the contents of the textbooks for the Orthodox Religious Education, in order to try to observe this subject in the context of the current processes in the social structure of Republic of Srpska, especially in connection with the tendencies to link the state more closely with the (national) church, and society with Orthodox religion.

The textbook for the 5th grade tells about the history of the Christian Church, from Christ until the modern time. In brief, it tells about the works of the apostles, first of all of apostle Paulus, the recognition of Christianity, holy synods, the Christianization of the Slavs, church divisions (between the Catholic and Orthodox church in the year 1054 and the appearance of Protestantism in the 14th century). It points at the revealing of Islam, the fall of Byzantium under the Turks, and the organization of the Orthodox Church. It is highlighted that the Orthodox Church has maintained the purity of the apostles' faith, whereas the Catholic Church organizes the church according to its own will (Mojsilovic, 2002: 41). Ecumenism is dealt with on one page and a half, pointing out its striving to overcome the long divisions between Christians. It is written that, according to some Orthodox critics, Ecumenism is the product of a Protestant view of Christianity. It understands that there is no one truth and one church, yet all of them possess something of the truth. It points out the presence of members of Judaism, Islam and other religions at the meetings of the World Church Councils, the goal of which is the creation of tone universal world religion. It is concluded that, after that, the Antichrist would come. Therefore, the Orthodox should leave the WCC (Mojsilovic, 2002: 54-55). The existence of a large Orthodox diaspora is also mentioned, and interesting, it is written that many citizens of those states, where the Orthodox have moved, have turned to Orthodoxy. In that way they turn back to the faith of their ancestors, which was overshadowed by un-orthodox elements (Mojsilovic, 2002: 57). In this part of the

textbook, one may perceive a maximalism and messianism which can lead, on the practical level, to intolerance and conflicts with others, “non-believers”. So, it is mentioned that the mission of the Orthodox Church is to go among the all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Sun and the Holy Spirit. Where the Orthodox are not in the position to preach, they should pray to God for those who are still living in the darkness of ignorance and wait to be enlightened with the gospel of Christ.

The textbook for the 6th grade speaks about the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church and national history. They are presented as linked and intermingled. This derives from the history itself, where the state and the Orthodox Church have strived toward the so called *symphony* – where they work in mutual accord yet with the declarative independence of both; from the historical fact that, under the Turkish rule, the church had the role of maintaining ethnic identity; as well as from the modern strivings to link the church more closely with the state and *vice versa*. The rule of certain Serbian medieval rulers is briefly described, and the majority of them are described as **founders** (they have built the churches, shrines, monasteries). The majority of them, before their natural death, became monks, and on the graves of most of them, many of miracles have taken place. The rulers who expanded the territory of the state are written about with much praise. The stress is laid on the fall of the Serbian medieval state and its submission to the Turkish Empire (Pajic, 2002: 11-36) The Kosovo battle is described not only as a military conflict, but also in the context of the clash between Islam and Christianity. In that way, the military conflict, which has political consequences (the accelerated fall of the Serbian state), is understood and described in religious symbols and colors. This derives not only from the inherent connections between religion and politics present in Islam, but also from the connections, which are present in Orthodoxy, with the state, ethnos, and afterwards with the nation. The conflict is perceived in the light of the so-called Kosovo ethics, the basis of which is, it is presumed, the Christian teaching about the soul. It assumes service to the high ideals of justice and truth, freedom and sacrifice...The striving for the so called “freedom of all Serbian areas” is built onto that, thus the Kosovo ethics is considered as the highest ideal and moral achievement of the consciousness of the entire nation (Pajic, 2002: 38). The stress is also laid on the period of struggles for national freedom, and on the role of the Orthodox Church and its

representatives in this process, and their struggle against the pretension of the Catholic Church to convert the Serbs (Pajic, 2002: 41, 50, 55).

The suggestion for this textbook would be, that it should be mentioned that ascertain messianism and missionarism is present in all monotheistic religions. They all believe in one God, who has revealed the only one truth through the prophets, and so they claim to possess the whole truth. Also, through this kind of approach (that is to say, through describing the history of the church together with the national history), there is a danger that the members of other religious communities would be described in the context of the history of Serbian state and church, and their crises in the different periods of turbulent Balkan history. In that way, the others are seen as attackers of the state of “this earthly paradise”, in which the church and the state were, under the medieval Nemanjic dynasty. Therefore it is necessary to introduce to the students the doctrines and rituals of other religions, with whose adherents the Serbs have also lived together, not only in conflicts. Only in that way would religious education would fulfill its second goal, and that is the introduction of more universal values, which is a necessary precondition for creating a free and critical individual. Otherwise, religious education will have a conservative function, for in the context of the fall of communism, in societies, which had neither true civil revolution nor enlightenment, the conservative and traditionalistic religion with its all-political consequences will be revealed (Vrcan, 1986-190, 195). In support of this view, we may quote the Russian Orthodox philosopher Berdjajev, who was against the collective impersonal principles present in Orthodoxy (the link with the state, nation etc.) and for the unity of persons, who are linked with love, for only the personalities can be members of the church (Berdjajev, 2001- 72).

In the textbook for the 7th grade, the students are introduced to Orthodox dogma. It speaks of God, the creation of the world, Jesus Christ, his resurrection, man, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life (Stojanovic, 202: 5-20). Here can be found maximalistic and “true- faith” claims, such as “we Orthodox admit that our church is the true continuity of that first community, established by the descending of the Holy Spirit on the apostles” (Stojanovic, 2002: 5). The others are spoken of in only one chapter: about fatalism. There, it is written that the belief in fate is present in Arabian religion, Greek mythology, Hinduism, Islam, Chinese religion etc. Only in Judaism and

Christianity, God is understood as the all-knowing and free person, and man is a free person as well: he decides freely for the community with God, and in that way transcends the limits of transient things and sees the everlasting (Stojanovic, 2002: 20-21). At the end of the textbook, there is mention of the sects, and it says that Jesus himself warned his disciples of the possible appearance of false Messiahs and prophets. The students are warned that the goal of the sects is destroying the family and person, and thus the society as a whole (Stojanovic, 2002: 33-37). Through that kind of interpretation, the difference between the forms of religious organizations, that is to say between church, denomination, sect and cult, is not made; also, the difference between the sects is not mentioned, for some sects withdraw from the world, and some are uninterested in worldly matters, not all of them are aggressive.

As we already mentioned, religious education should introduce to the students not only the dogmas of the “official” religion, but also broader values, in order to induce their personal growth. Learning of only one religion and its dogmas, can lead to the dangers of religious scrupulosity/stiffness and ritualism, which can lead to anxiety and neurosis (Jerotic, 1997: 96). One of the ways to prevent that is a broader and wider religious education, and upbringing for dialogue and tolerance. Otherwise, the personal conflicts and neurosis will be “overcome” through the conflicts with others, and through the so-called projection of one’s own unconsciousness- “shadow”, as Jung used to say, onto the others.

The textbook for the 8th grade speaks about Christian ethics. This textbook is very important, because one of the reasons for the introduction of religious instruction in schools, was that the school should also introduce ethical values to students, and help them to learn virtue and become mature and honest people (it is not enough to enable them to take active part within the current and future division of labor, but also to lead appropriate life). It is mentioned that the humans are the only moral beings on the earth, for they are endowed with reason and freedom. This enables man to make distinguish the bad and the good, and to choose between them (Vrhovac, 2002: 5). As the virtues, such as modesty, moral purity, grace, benevolence etc. are universal and present in almost all religions, the textbook offers in that way the horizon for individual fulfillment and its righteous living in this world. In any case, it would do no harm to use the comparative

method, and point at the ethic in other religions. Of course, the problem is also whether such abstract counting and mentioning of virtues and sins, although illustrated with some examples from the Bible and everyday life, can contribute to the development of a moral personality, although according to some of the empirical researches about religious instruction, which have taken place in Republic of Srpska, one of the reasons for the students' appreciation of this subject is that they have become better persons with its help (Milosevic, 2004). It should not be presumed and even concluded, that our children would become worse if the religious education had introduced to them contents of other religions and rituals of different religious communities.

Instead of a conclusion

Both religion and education should not only strive to know and adjust to the existing social structure, but also strive to overcome it. This can be achieved, if the students would not only remember the facts and different educational contents, yet also be taught to think, lead a dialogue, *astonish* (according to Plato, philosophy origins from the state of astonishing), pose inconvenient questions, and accept the universal, not only the particular values of their communities. Therefore it is necessary that religious education, where the students meet with the religion of their ancestors and their national culture and religion, provide knowledge of other religions, as well as basic knowledge from the history of religion, philosophy of religion, and sociology of religion in order to obtain general culture, which would be "incomplete and shallow without those sciences of religion" (Susnjic, 1998: 147). Also, referring to the fact that religion in modern society is and should be a private matter, and that the church is separated from the state, religious education in the spirit of the system of only one faith cannot be justified.

If the religiosity of the population is a high value that one strives toward (e.g. as in Republic of Srpska), it is not unimportant what type of religiosity is desirable: authoritarian or humanitarian (Fromm, 1986). Judging by the textbooks analyzed in this work, one is striving toward the authoritarian type of religiosity (idolatry of nation, state, Orthodox Church). It is taken for granted that society, in order to function, demands a high value consensus, and the liberal notion of religion as a matter of private will is deliberately rejected.

Also, if the God in Christianity has endowed a man with freedom (as it is claimed), and offered, not imposed on him the values and norms to lead a valuable and ordered life, he also has given to him the freedom to accept or reject them. The current processes in religious education of Republic of Srpska seem to reject this highest ideal of Christianity: the human freedom.

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