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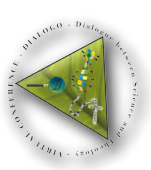
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Explicit Evaluative Activity in the Subject „Religion"

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ABSTRACT

Unlike subjects in which the role of the explicit evaluation is almost unanimously accepted in traditional mass education, there are some subjects in which the lack of a certain talent or of certain abilities leads to poor results, to the decrease of self-esteem and even to perceiving the compulsoriness of attending them as a sort of humiliation for the pupils who are in this kind of situation.

Besides music and art, physical education requires certain and almost visible skills, while literature, mathematics, physics, biology, and geography in their turn require multiple specific mental abilities. We consider that religion has got a special status, for which apparently no special skills are required, whose evaluation is among the most demanding towards the teacher, but can lead to real „mutations" in the axiological system of the adult-to-be.

Through this paper, we try to identify some of the difficulties in the evaluative activity in Religion, focusing mainly on elementary school.

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I. INTRODUCTION

By „explicit evaluation" or institutional evaluation we understand a „deliberate and socially organized act that leads to expressing a value judgment", as it is defined by J.-M. Barbier in his 1990 paper, *L'évaluation en formation* [1]. From a general social perspective, this form of evaluation is found along *spontaneous evaluation*, consisting in value judgments based on implicit and subjective criteria, and along *implicit evaluation*, a „universal social act", preceding almost all human decisions. [2] Although in institutionalized education all these three forms of evaluation are to be found, „the pupils' evaluation in the process of education is part of the category of instituted/explicit evaluation" [3].

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Given the fact that in the last decade the academic community has preferred the phrase ,,evaluative activity" to the concept of evaluation [4], and since we deal with evaluative practices and their impact on the primary and secondary beneficiary of the institutionalized education, we embraced this vision, mainly focusing on the situations that occur in elementary education.

Despite the fact that ,,current theories on education insistently promote the idea that modern evaluation must be an integrant part of the education process, to be intimately associated to it" [5], ,,one can notice a discrepancy between the rich theoretical discourse and the poor evaluative practices" [6], which can explain the difficulty in evaluating *Religion as a school subject*.

II. General competences in Religion as a school subject (preparatory grade – 4th grade)

According to the curricula of 2013 [7], 2014 [8] respectively, the following general abilities are mentioned for elementary school:

1. *Applying some norms of behavior specific to religious morals, in different life contexts*
2. *Cooperating with the children and the adults in the family, in accordance with religious values*
3. *Actively exploring some elements of the everyday life, from the perspective of their own faith.*

In the same documents, among the theoretical specifications on evaluation of the subject *Religion*, we can find the following: ,,The process of evaluation will focus on recognizing the learning experiences and the abilities acquired by the children in non-formal or informal contexts." This requires the teacher to ,,monitor" the pupil beyond the teaching process, either as a systematic observer during extracurricular activities, fie or as an investigator of the child's behavior towards his family, neighbors, friends and relatives, but also of his attendance in church and his carrying out the religious practices pertaining to Christianity.

III. Motivation and the purpose of evaluation

Just as in any other subjects where it is applied, evaluation in religion as a school subject in traditional mass education is a *sine-qua-non* component of the teaching process considered to consist in the teaching-learning-evaluation triad, according to some authors, this being the most important component of the triad, since it has got visible results and intersects many factors: teachers, school, parents, local communities/administrations, various decision makers in the field of education, and to different degrees, the pupil. For the last one mentioned, "the grade is like a warning message more about what might happen to him and less about what and how much he knows". [9]

The purpose of the evaluation is closely related to the functions of the evaluation. **The general functions** of the evaluation are *to detect, diagnose and forecast* the results of the learning process, and the **specific functions**, in relation with the factors involved, are *to inform, motivate, educate/form, control, classify, select, prioritize, regulate*.

IV. Concrete aspects in grading

In many schools we have visited for educational purposes (the students' pedagogical training and special inspections for the first degree in teaching), we have discovered the following situations in explicit evaluation in Religion as a school

subject:

1. all pupils get the F.B. grade (or the maximum grade), in order to be stimulated to take part with pleasure in the proposed evaluation activities;

2. all pupils are examined and graded with maximum rigor, given the fact that most of the times they do not have the possibility to follow the advice ,,Believe and do not doubt!" and they do not have the family's support in attending mass and in putting certain Christian rituals (making the sign of the cross, fasting, confessing, taking Communion) into practice;

3. where the teacher is also the children's confessor, especially in the countryside, there is a subjective evaluation, for (actively) attending church, confessing, taking Communion and belonging to a profoundly religious family favorably influences rewarding the pupil with the maximum grade or giving him the ,,Foarte bine" (Very Well Done) grade, even if the acquired knowledge does not justify this result;

4. there are, of course, situations in which the grading is generous in order to stimulate the participation in activities, but also to offer feedback on the progress in acquiring knowledge and especially a certain position in the class hierarchy.

We will go through the amendments that can be made especially to the first three situations that we have encountered, even though they are easily deductible, for they are also arguments for our option to eliminate grading in the subject we deal with.

In the first situation we have identified (when all pupils get the maximum grade or the ,,F.b." grade), not only is there no real feedback on the amount of knowledge, but also there is an induced feeling of the futility of the effort made in participating in the activity, the subject being in danger of becoming obsolete. Why would a pupil who does not have enough intrinsic motivation for this learn if the result is predictable and maximal?!... Neither the subject, nor the teacher enjoys great valorization as long as the result is not motivational, and the teacher shows indifference towards assessing the knowledge of his or her pupils, towards ranking them in accordance with their knowledge and towards the other factors who are interested in the pupils' school results. In such a situation, Religion as a subject appears to be a means of equalizing the pupils' performances, a situation which is negatively perceived by the diligent students, and which is artificial towards the low-grade pupils, who know their possibilities, and are aware of their poor implication in acquiring knowledge.

A value judgment on rewarding bad with good, inadequate/unsustainable, of course, in the context it appears in, expressed by the voice of Petronius in the novel ,,Quo vadis" might be paraphrased regarding this type of equalizing grading: ,,if we give good reward for bad behavior, what will we reward good behavior with? And if the reward is the same for both kinds of behavior, what is the point of being good people?" [10] Adapting this, we can ask ourselves (and the pupils ask themselves, too) why learning is good, if, no matter to what extent it is accomplished, the reward is the same?!...

In the second situation that we mentioned earlier (when pupils are examined and graded with maximum rigor), given the fact that the power of representation of certain actions labeled as ,,miracles", of the contradiction in the age of the world mentioned by different sciences (physics, history, astronomy, geology etc.) and religion, as well as the paradox of many of the biblical parables [11] (for example, that of the unfaithful servant, that of the barren fig tree, that of the prodigal son, etc.), pupils can greatly suffer because of a

low grade they get, ending up not learning the respective subject, being profoundly inhibited or even perceiving attending classes as a huge burden. Extremely rarely it so happens that a poor undesirable result gives the pupil the ambition to show that that is not his or her real level, that getting it was an accident or that he or she has more knowledge than those previously assessed. Here we can bring forward the argument that religion could benefit from the same treatment as history, since the events and facts presented should be taken as such by the pupil, who often does not have the possibility to verify their reliability (because they do not have the proper studying tools and de methods, and quite often the scholastic sources of information).

The third situation, in which subjectivity advantages or disadvantages the pupils under examination, in relation to their religious practices (or sometimes just those of the family!) or, more exactly, to the way they are perceived in extracurricular context by the confessor-teacher, implies even greater drawbacks, in the sense of clearly disadvantaging the children whose families do not attend church and do not encourage their children (sometimes they do not even allow them) to carry out various religious practices. For example, fasting (both for Christians, and especially for Muslims) implies, among others, a strict diet that people in poor health or those whose jobs require a great amount of concentration (airplane pilots, air traffic controllers, surgeons, professional athletes etc.) cannot observe, which means that their children cannot observe either, and demanding jobs, in shifts, prevent them from attending church. Moreover, in the case of thousands of families who work abroad (at least from Romania) and leave their kids with a legal guardian, emotional deprivation and domestic chores also prevent mass attendance and other various religious practices. As a matter of fact, despite the massive percentage of the population who have declared their religious faith in the 2011 census (only 0,11% being atheists, and 0,1% agnostics and non-religious persons, and very few people without a declared religion, given the fact that 18 religions and religious cults were declared, orthodox one being predominant, with 86,45% of the total population [12]), churches would be too small if 10% of the population attended mass!

Paradoxically, the first general competence of *Religion* as a school subject (in elementary school), *applying some norms of behavior specific to religious morals, in different life contexts,* is closely related to religious practices, and accomplishing certain specific competencies (for example, 1.3.) implies going to church. Made solely with the teacher (since there is only one *Religion* class per week), the simple ,,visits" are irrelevant/insufficient, especially when paid outside the hours of mass or when getting only a minute part of it.

Beyond these possible amendments to the way of grading pupils in *Religion*, just as in *Moral and civic education*, there appear numerous dilemmas with regard to evaluation: *Do we evaluate only acquired knowledge or developed competences as well? (if verifying their assimilation is quite difficult); If one component of the grade is given by the attendance in mass and accomplishing various religious practices (fasting, confessing, taking the Communion, etc.), how can the teacher know they are true? (In other words: how does he or she know they are not mere simulacra, that will be abandoned once the child becomes an adult?); How can faith, one of the highest values of any religion, be validated and quantified?; Could a faithful child, who fears God and has hope in Him, have his faith partially annihilated, in case he did not assimilate a series of facts/information that are not historically proven nor are they easy to retain? Some of the prelates and theologians*

assure us of God's love for mankind, while others present Him as a harsh judge of men's sins, and teachers, depending on their mentors and their personal life experience, follow either of these two perspectives. In addition there are the pupil's own readings and his or her collateral experiences. What point of reference can they have in shaping their own vision on this topic?

Regarding this last aspect, we share Emil Păun's opinion on evaluation: "Often, evaluation is influenced by the teacher's personal history (especially that as a former pupil), social origin, and professional experience. The teacher has the tendency to identify in certain pupils the behavior he himself had during his school years. Through this identification process, the teacher develops (most of the times unconsciously) expectations and he values that behavior from his history as a former pupil whose reproduction he favors in his or her pupils." [13]

Therefore, if the teacher was stimulated/rewarded/favored in evaluation by extracurricular behavior, he is likely to do the same when evaluating the pupils he identifies with, not taking into account the possibility of a profoundly religious and meek spirit in his faith and practices. Moreover, the existence in the *Bible* of certain antagonist advice [14] regarding the behavior of a good Christian can cause confusion to the pupil, or can lead to his following one piece of this advice.

Conclusions

We plead to keep *Religion* as a subject in schools because the covered knowledge area is so vast, both as a field of interest, and as a cultural field, but also because, under ideal conditions, it facilitates the assimilation of some moral norms and of some desirable moral and civic behavior, offering examples of good behavior and amendable counterexamples, but also historical and geographical landmarks, at the same time inviting to reflection and excellence, at least from the perspective of the traditional educational ideal.

We admit to the difficulty of the evaluative activity in this subject and we express our hope that the specialists in this field, especially pedagogues, will search for and will identify evaluation strategies specific to this subject, that will assess the knowledge of the pupil, his developed religious practices, but also his faith and his ability to make value judgments in the case of various controversies among the theologians' opinions. Regarding this last aspect, we do not necessarily plead to scientifically establish the truth for example using the chronovisor, but to give proof of religious tolerance and to follow the immutable values such as Truth, Good and Beautiful, in general, also the pupil's reading, and the ability to give arguments and to comprehend facts.

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[2] idem
[3] idem
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[13] ibidem, p. 216.

[14] „And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites for they like to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others; truly I tell you: they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:5-6), respectively, the urge to public collective prayer „if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew, 18: 19-20).

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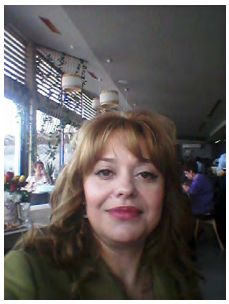
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