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Understanding the Basis of Upbringing and Education in the Orthodox Church

Razumevanje temeljev vzgoje in izobraževanja v pravoslavni Cerkvi

Abstract: Authentic Christianity has its own concept of upbringing and education, based on the Biblical perspective of man and of entire reality, and developed and elaborated during past centuries through practice and experience. The upbringing offered by the modern culture has always been and still is predominantly humanistic. The ideal of upbringing and its goals, as well as the methods of education, depend on basic presumptions of such culture. Like everything else, pedagogical thought depends on the apprehension of the world, of man and of their final goals. The term »education« comprehended this way gets completely new, different contents and meaning. It is not just a mere acquisition of knowledge from one or several fields, but it has more of an anthropological and ethical and even deep spiritual meaning. Educational – to put it differently – formation means renewal of God’s image in man, its discovery and further development. Simple people, uncontaminated by superficial experience of solely intellectual upbringing, have never forgotten that deep ethical meaning of the world image which also implies organic relation between education and ethics, education and spiritual life in general.

Key words: Church, education, upbringing, liturgy, spirituality

Povzetek: Pristno krščanstvo pozna svoje lastno pojmovanje vzgoje in izobraževanja, temelječe na biblijskem pogledu na človeka in na celotno resničnost, ki se je v preteklih stoletjih razvilo in izostrilo skozi prakso in izkušnjo. Vzgoja, ki jo ponuja moderna kultura, je bila in je še vedno pretežno humanistična. Ideal vzgoje in njenih ciljev – prav tako vzgojnih metod – je odvisen od temeljnih predpostavk tovrstne kulture. Kakor vse drugo, je tudi pedagoška misel odvisna od razumevanja sveta, človeka in njegovih končnih ciljev. Tako razumljen izraz »vzgoja« dobiva povsem nove, drugačne vsebine in pomene. Ne gre zgolj za pridobitev znanja z enega ali več področij, temveč ima to poudarjeno antropološki, etični in celo globok duhovni pomen. Vzgojna formacija – če uporabimo drugačen izraz – pomeni prenovitev božje podobe v človeku, njeno odkritje in

nadaljnje razvijanje. Preprosti ljudje, ki so obvarovani površne izkušnje izključno intelektualne vzgoje, niso nikoli pozabili na tisti globlji etični pomen podobe sveta, ki med drugim predvideva organski odnos med vzgojo in etiko, vzgojo in duhovnim življenjem nasploh.

Ključne besede: Cerkev, izobraževanje, vzgoja, liturgija, duhovnost

1. God-Man Jesus Christ as Alpha and Omega of education

Pedagogical thought depends on the apprehension of the world, of man and his final goals. The meaning of upbringing depends on the meaning of man's life, and the meaning of man's life depends on the grounds his life is based on and on the final goals he is striving to realize. These two bases influence not only one's upbringing, but also the methods of upbringing themselves.

Giving the complete meaning and contents to the concept of upbringing is only possible by finding true grounds of upbringing and of its final goals. For the Christian experience and perspective of reality these grounds are foremost anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological. That means that it is necessary to return to the Christian anthropology, first to find the Christian nature and the goal of human image and human being, to know how to nurture that human being and how to educate him so that he could achieve his Christian purpose. When a thought based on Revelation starts to deal with the concept of man, it also touches God Incarnate/God-Man, that is the Christological basis and the orientation of everything that exists, thus of the man as well. (Janaras 2004) The encounter of God and man and the achievement of eternal goals of a human being is executed and achieved in the mysterious significance of the Church which is at the same time the workshop of salvation, transfiguration and theosis/deification. By its nature a man is not just an individual, he is also a part of community, which is why his upbringing has to have not just individual character and meaning, but also social – i.e. the ecclesial ones. (Amphilochius 2000)

A man is a cosmic being who lives in the world, imbued and conditioned by this world, but also the being which gives sense to the world. While speaking about the basis of upbringing, it is necessary to have at least a short review of and a brief idea about the entire creation as a unity; about the possibilities contained in it, existing in it; and about the possibilities of a man as a physical being. The review of the basis of Orthodox upbringing, its methods and goals would be incomplete if it did not include the most tragic fact of human history: the Fall of Adam and Eve. Perceived through the prism of the original sin, upbringing obtains soteriological character. (Nelas 2001) Upbringing perceived in such a manner is not just education of man, but also his salvation from sin, evil and death. Thus, the entire methodology of education apprehended this way is not just the methodology of education but the methodology of salvation as well. The goal of up-

bringing is not just enlightenment and fulfilment of a child's soul by truth, beauty and goodness, but primarily liberation of a human being from imperfections and evil which darken his soul and prevent him from accessing and accepting the truth in a full way.

Education is not just pure acquisition of knowledge from one field or from many fields, but it also has anthropological and ethical, even deep spiritual sense. Education or – to put it differently – formation means renewal of God's image in man, its discovery and further development. Education is the renewal and structuring of a man according to the image of the One who created him, and man's feeding on eternal God's light, truth, beauty and goodness – all the divine perfections. (Tomasović 2000)

Such an approach to upbringing does not exclude modern pedagogical experience. It gives foundations, cohesion, stability and sense to everything that is healthy in this experience, revealing man's true image and his eternal purpose.

Lately the term Orthodox pedagogy has been regarded as the school subject, one of the disciplines of the Orthodox thought whose contents are being articulated in the form of a program for the needs of ecclesiastical education in schools. This subject is variously regarded and has different concepts at different faculties and high schools within the local Churches. Orthodox pedagogy is regarded as one of defined fields of academic theology which uses scientific methods of research. The basic deficiency of such kind of a study is its detachment from the Church, acquisition of scientific form or specialization which is cherished outside the Church and without real connection with it. Parallel to that term, another term has also started to be used – catechetics, which deals with practical needs in the field of pastoral-pedagogical activities of the Church, without deeper systematic-theological rooting.

2. Ecclesiological dimensions of pedagogy

Orthodox pedagogy can and should represent an important element when considering relations in Orthodox upbringing which make one of the dimensions of the Church life. Even if it is true that theology and ascetic experience of Christian life are two different things, it should not be thought that one excludes and then annuls the other. The Orthodox Christians of modern times do not need so much the science or professional competence which use rational methods of studying pedagogical processes and find their natural place in academic institutions. Instead of that there is a vivid need for theological devising of the existing pedagogical communication which shall, in an appropriate way, be derived from the experience and practice of Orthodox upbringing and in a pleasing manner confirm that experience. In other words, the Orthodox Church needs authentic Christian pedagogy as theology.

The crucial criterion of credibility of the Orthodox theology is its deep rooting in the tradition of the Church. Truly Orthodox education can only be the one whi-

ch is based on pedagogical tradition of Orthodox Christianity. This vivid pedagogical tradition gives ability to our generation to consider pedagogical relations of the faithful in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Nourishing of the Holy Tradition in the Church life does not mean adhering to formality and traditional forms of order and system or canon observed mechanically, as some magical, recipes of truth authorized by the Church. Commitment to the Orthodox tradition does not mean commitment to educational formulas or rules of behavior, but living in the truth of relations in Christ, in the light of the Holy Spirit. (Schmemman 1993, 57)

The experience of personal participation in the relations of Orthodox Christians with children is not the same as knowledge of some pedagogical principles and their application, even if the principles are called Christian or Orthodox. The essence of the pedagogical tradition of the Church is the manner in which the Christian love that nourishes people shows itself in certain historical circumstances and real-life situations. The fullness of Orthodox pedagogical tradition cannot be built by any systematic takeover of instructions or styles of upbringing applied in the past of the Christian world. It is achieved by growing in the sacrament of unity with God, Who in the past led, kept and nourished our fathers and today – in the same manner – in new historical conditions nourishes our children and us.

In the so-called practical theology of the Church of the 19th and 20th century there was the syndrome of simplifying and reorganizing the pedagogical tradition of the Church from the moral point of view. The temptation of moralism related to insensitivity of Christians for responsible participation in historical events and with pathos of unconditional fulfilment of Christian duties. In certain sense, the entire second millennium of Christianity, and especially its second half, can be understood through domination of ethical construal of faith. However, it was just recently that the focus of interest of practical theology shifted towards deeper ecclesiological considerations. A change is happening in the general practice and a shift of Christian devotion from predominantly moralistic one to predominantly Church theology. The ones who are aware of the change strive to articulate the Orthodox pedagogy and other fields of practical theology as one of the aspects of Orthodox Christian ecclesiology. (John 2013)

The Orthodox ecclesiology as consideration of the Church characteristics cannot mean analyses of some external subject, but it is the matter of personal and common experience of Christians, of us as Church and of our personal relations as the Orthodox. The relations of love in Christ cannot be spoken about while excluding personal participation in such relations, or while taking it independently from existential position which the participation itself implies. Relations in Christ are the only relations that are studied in Orthodox pedagogy. Christ's love is the only place where to search and recognize authentic Orthodox upbringing. In the second half of the 20th century the so-called critical theory appeared dedicating much attention to differentiating between the true and false conscience of a man. This difference becomes especially conspicuous in pedagogical intentions of adult people. Critical science harshly stepped forward against empirical research and their numerical neutrality in all social sciences, including pedagogy.

The interest that should manage knowledge is emancipation, liberation of human beings, which represents more than usual practical interests of science in Western world. The activities of upbringing and education, socialization and nourishing of young generations should be liberated from all the ideological preconditions dictated by the proponents of social power.

3. Modern challenges of education in relation to the tradition of the Church

Today the term pedagogy is regarded as the science of upbringing, based on the results of empirical researches, but also as the philosophy of upbringing always backed by some value judgement. Pedagogy can also mean a set of practical instructions for children's upbringing. These different understandings of pedagogy should not be mixed, so as not to allow someone's individual thinking to be regarded as a scientific fact. The history of social sciences and humanistic disciplines has been marked by periods of extreme predominance of one term over other terms, when that particular term becomes the key for understanding of the entire perspective on the world. The categories of order and reasoning, that is of system and rationality, were the key ones for determining pedagogical standpoints of the modern time, as well as for defining pedagogy as a science in general.

A scientist always lives in dual reality: the one which he is analyzing and the other one which he is creating by his theories. The reality changes every time when people change their theoretical views on it. This principle also stands for upbringing of children. The existing relations with children cannot be rejected or disputed, just somebody's theoretical standpoints regarding them. The communication with children is being built as an integral part of life, and the meanings of that communication can be chosen, construed in different ways and considered on the bases on different grounds. The adults view the child's world in one possible way, which is predetermined by the structure of their senses, by their standpoints, beliefs and expectations. What this world is, people cannot know, irrespective of their perspective. Therefore, the pedagogical intentions of individuals are always conditioned by their feelings, experiences, notions that lead them, theories that they advocate, methods that they use, interests, needs, wishes and values they are following.

People do not see the world around them the way it is, they rather see it depending on what they themselves are. Consequently, childhood has always mainly been mental creation of the adults, created on the basis of their ethical and pedagogical beliefs. Children always exist and live in a relation to the world of adults. The truth about children is not comprehension of a child the way the child is, but always the comprehension of child's relation to adults and to adults' needs relative to the child. Therefore, it is important in pedagogy that the presumptions of scientific exploration, and/or philosophical approach be clearly and articulately stated. In our time, these should be orthodox values, which value both the per-

sonality of a mature person and the personality of a child. An important question is from which standpoint the theorists of pedagogy are presenting their opinions. If they act in conformity with their personal interest, justification or intentions or in conformity with interests of a group which they belong to, their theories cannot be accepted as indisputable scientific achievements.

4. Liturgical catechism as all-pervading

The question is: What to do and how to proceed, but also which answer to give to all these questions and conclusions? One of the key answers is given in the Sacrament of Liturgy. (Blasse 1999) Without liturgy there is no theology, no Church, no spiritual life. In the Orthodox Church as in divine-human organism we also find included »the unsearchable riches of Christ« (Eph. 3:8, RSV). Through divine services and its own methodology the Church reveals »the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things« (Eph. 3:9). Serving to God presents »good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them« (Eph. 2:10) and not only to earthly creatures, but to heavenly ones as well. That wisdom of God, revealed in the Church, makes the Church our school. In it as such – education is permanent. (Basil the Great 1991) Both in its nature and in its activity, the Church gives not only knowledge, but also the ways for its acquisition (methods of learning – virtues). All that it is and that it has as a goal, in conformity with the words of the Apostles, is that the faithful »may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth« of the Church since they are »built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone« (Eph. 2:20); »to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God« (Eph. 3:18-19). (Balashov 2007) The one who is filled by the power of the Holy Spirit with divine blessing in the Church, may not possess piles of knowledge of God, man and the world, and nevertheless he possesses the manner of adopting virtues, i.e. the manner of adopting health of soul and body, true enlightenment and eternal life. Biblical terms such as »putting on Christ« (Gal. 3:27), »formation of Christ in us« (Gal. 4:19), »dwelling of Christ in our hearts« (Eph.3:17), »strengthening with might through his Spirit« (Eph. 3:16); calling man »God's temple« (1 Cor. 3:16) and underlining the fact »the Holy Spirit dwells within us« (2 Tim. 1:14) – confirm that »to be filled by the fullness of God« has deeper and more organic meaning. By the same symbolic, that deeper meaning shall be seen in Church education and upbringing. Our vocation is to be sanctified wholly, soul and body (ref. 1 Thess. 5:23); that is the law, rule of faith, logic and nature of Gospel faith. (Sando 2016)

The integrity of the Orthodox, and thus of Christian pedagogy is especially visible in divine services. Divine service means to be fed on the Bread of Life or to »acquire the Holy Spirit« as Saint Seraphim of Sarov used to say. This mystery of divine service in which both the world and man reach their fullness is recognised and embraced in the Holy Communion. Liturgy indeed gives us full truth and full life of the