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INTERFAITH CONFLICTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
AMONG DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS HERITAGES*

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Introduction

Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* of the Second Vatican Council emphasizes regarding the Catholic education in 1965:

“[...] All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share [...]”¹

Over the past three decades, a number of analyzes have dealt with the question of whether the current framework of the public, private, and church school systems provides an adequate guarantee to ensure the first generation human rights principle

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¹ *Conc. Vaticanum II* (1962–1965), Sessio VII (28 oct. 1965), *Declaratio de educatione christiana: Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, Bologna, 1973.3 959–968., Art. 1: 960.

of religious freedom within the institutionalized teaching and education.² While the concept of members of the society gradually altering regarding the classical – stable – values³, rejecting them as ‘outdated’ principles of thinking, there are an increasing intention to influence on individuals’ beliefs regarding their own inherited religious conviction and values, on their way of life, and also on their culture in order to eliminate these from the institutional and public life too.⁴

This stressfully affects the institutional forms of teaching and education.⁵ Despite the fact that resolutions on the required circumstances which can promote to fulfill the right of religious freedom within the current complex education systems are regularly published, and in the same time are composed several scientific analyses and overviews which discuss the positive and flourishing form of the work of the Catholic educational system. Unfortunately, the content of these well-meant articles – regarding the customs or legal regulations of most countries – is very far from that reality which exists within the day-to-day situation of the educational system.⁶ No matter how unfortunate, but the last renaissance of the Catholic education system was objectively working as a competitive system only a short time between 1990 and 2005.⁷

Conflicts related to the realization of religious freedom are strongly present at all levels of the educational system. Therefore, it makes necessary new solutions – different from those which were developed in the 18th – 19th century – which can give acceptable answers for challenges of the 21st century.⁸

² Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: The religious dimension of education as one of the primary principles of religious freedom based on human dignity. *Folia Theologica et Canonica*, V (27/19) [2016] 137–144., especially 137–138.

³ In detail cf. Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: *Protecting and Developing Values – an Interpretation of Encyclical Letter Laudato si’* (American Engineers Forum on Sustainability: Technical and Engineering Challenges of Addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Pittsburgh, PA, November 1st 2018).

⁴ Cf. e.g., SZUROMI, Szabolcs A.: Erények vagy értékek? A teremtett világ megőrzésének egy lehetséges értelmezése. In: PUSKÁS, Attila – PERENDY, László – LÉVAI, Ádám (ed.): *Isten dicsősége – A teremtés szépsége: Teológiai tanulmányok* (Varia Theologica 11), Budapest, 2020. 249–260.

⁵ Cf. Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: The Epoch of Crisis of the Classical Categories. In: E. Szilveszter, VIZI – Tamás Gergely, KUCSERA (ed.): *Europe in a World in Transformation* (Conference at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 14th–16th December 2006), Budapest, 2008. 165–171.

⁶ Cf. KUMINETZ, Géza: *A tudományos élet és a személyiségfejlesztés sajátos fellegvára a katolikus egyetem*. (Pázmány Könyvek 10), Budapest 2020.; KUMINETZ, Géza: Megfontolások az egyetem, sajátosan a katolikus egyetem fogalmáról. *Kánonjog*, 23, (2021), 7–28.

⁷ Zenon GROCHOLEWSKI: «Ex Corde Ecclesiae». Stimolo per la fioritura dell’insegnamento superiore cattolica. *Path*, 14, (2015/1), 9–22.; Iñigo MARTÍNEZ-ECHEVARRÍA: L’essenza della relazione tra università cattolica e autorità ecclesiastica. Profili giuridici nei discorsi di Giovanni Paolo II e Benedetto XVI. *Path*, 14, (2015/1), 37–52.; Margherita Maria ROSSI: Un sapere per il bene dell’umanità. Annotazioni sulla Costituzione apostolica Ex corde Ecclesiae. *Path*, 14, (2015/1), 95–115.

⁸ In detail cf. Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: Religious Education of the Catholic Church, since the 18th century from canonical and ecclesiastical law aspects. *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* (under press).

I. Different types of school conflicts

School conflicts can depend on numerous circumstances and personal characteristics. Based on these – arranged according to different aspects – several groupings are possible.⁹ Considering these lists, I would like to draw attention to the following combined reasons:

- a) depending on the age and level of school system;
- b) personal cultural heritage;
- c) maturity;
- d) personal abilities;
- e) ability for persevere;
- f) previous – already learned – knowledge;
- g) personal interest;
- h) extent of activity or passivity;
- i) personal motivation;
- j) sociable or reclusion attitude;
- k) conflicts between education at home and at school;
- l) conflicts arising from a defective structure or organizational culture of the educational institution, at any level, which may affect the education and training of students;
- m) personal conflicts;
- n) ideological conflicts;
- o) political conflicts (according to the educational level, maturity and age of the students);
- p) intellectual conflicts;
- q) conflicts as conclusions of scientific debates;
- r) generational conflicts;
- s) theoretical conflicts (arisen from the different ways and method of thinking);
- t) and finally those conflicts which are on the basis of different religious conviction.

This list contains those reasons which can appear at any level and in any form of the educational system. Naturally the ideological, political, and intellectual conflicts mainly typical of high school and mostly of the university education, likewise conflicts because scientific debates. We can see that some of the conflicts are fundamentally dependent on the individual's personality, others on the individual's abilities. However, there is also important role of following a certain identity, tradition, ways of thinking and behaving which have been acquired within the family, transmitted from generations to generations.¹⁰ Here it is necessary to mention those different

⁹ In detail cf. M. BENTLEY: *Conflict Resolution in Schools: Quicker peace and service*. Cambridge, Mass. 1996.

¹⁰ Nana Afia Amponsaa OPOKU-ASARE – Harriet TAKYI – Margaret OWUSU-MENSAH: *Conflict Prevalence in Primary School and How It Is Understood to Affect Teaching and Learning in Ghana*. *SAGE Open*, (July-September 2015), 1–11.

values which become known by the student in the family, in the narrower circle of acquaintances, in the school – or other – communities, and in the wider social environment. Those conflicts which are on the basis of different religious conviction basically belong to this last group.

II. Religious heritage as a possible source of school conflicts

The existence of religion is coeval with the mankind. The religious conviction of different human communities has defined their culture on the day-to-day basis since the beginning of history.¹¹ Therefore, this essential characteristic has made a strong influence not only on the daily life, mentality, on the social relations and structures in general, but particularly on the education at home and even on its institutionalized system.¹² Hence, the personal attitude toward the ‘Saint’ is a natural feature of every human being, which feature is rooted in his/her own conscience. It is not accidental therefore, that the religious freedom has become one of the first-generation of human rights in the 18th century.¹³ Learning knowledge belonged to family duties together the introduction into the religious customs and heritage already in the Ancient times, which was supplemented by some ‘schools’ which gathered around a teacher of philosophy, rhetoric, or religion.¹⁴ The organized form of European public education has begun by the Catholic schools, which dominated this field until the 16th century, when we could see the transformation of this system in Europe into a Christian education. Through this process has been crystalized not only different models of state and church relationship, but also a strong basis for religious freedom as one of the most emblematic expression of human dignity.¹⁵ This new social and legal situation had needed new concept to protect the citizens’ rights for education according to their own religious conviction without intervention of the state into religious affairs (i.e. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26,1) and also with the Additional Protocol to the European Convention [May 30th 1952; Art. 2]).¹⁶ The *II Catholic – Orthodox Forum* (October 22nd 2010) underlined in the concluding ‘Communiqué’, that “The participants in the Forum believe that the role as dominating Church or State and Church should not result in a legal discrimination for the other churches and members of minority religious groups, whose religious

¹¹ Antonio María ROUCO VARELA: El derecho a la educación y sus titulares, ¿de nuevo en la incertidumbre histórica?. In: Antonio María ROUCO VARELA: *Ecclesia et Ius. Escritos de derecho canónico y concordatario* (Studia Canonica Matritensia 1), Madrid, 2014. 339–365., especially 340.

¹² SZUROMI, Szabolcs A.: *Bevezetés a katolikus hit rendszerébe* [Introduction into the system of the Catholic Faith] Budapest 2014.⁷ 13.

¹³ Cf. SZUROMI, Szabolcs A. – FERENCZY, Rita: *Kérdések az állami egyházjog köréből* [Questions about the ecclesiastical law] (Bibliotheca Instituti Postgradualis Iuris Canonici Universitatis Catholicae de Petro Pázmány nominatae III/17), Budapest 2014. 5, 45.

¹⁴ In detail, cf. Peter BROWN: *The World of Late Antiquity*. London 1971.

¹⁵ ROUCO VARELA op. cit. 389–409.

¹⁶ ROUCO VARELA op. cit. 342.

freedom should be fully guaranteed, including the right to profess their faith using any means respecting personal freedom.”¹⁷

III. The question's relevance at the universities

Focusing on the level of higher education must be recalled the evolvement of European form of university system. Historical research has revealed gradually during the last two decades, how complex was that process which had concluded into the establishment of universities between the last decades of the 11th and the first decades of the 13th century.¹⁸ Even those universities, which were erected by the ruler, received papal recognition during the High Middle Ages.¹⁹ We could see the effect on this system in the epoch of Reformation, when higher education has been much more diversified. After the catastrophic effect on the French educational system by the first period of the French revolution – 1789-1790 – Napoleon (†1821) was the one who restored the collapsed system in France.²⁰ The secularization movement has transformed the higher education all over the world too.²¹ Despite of the very first expressively entitled Catholic university – which was founded in Leuven (1425)²² – the so-called Catholic University’ network as a guarantee for protection of ‘religious identity’ within scientific instruction was established at end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century.²³

With the alteration in the above-mentioned frameworks, three correlated, yet parallel existing systems of university education have emerged for the modern time, which are still essential: state, private, and ecclesiastical higher education. Within these different systems – which have been organized basically as effect and contra effect of the Enlightenment movement – we can find different forms and intensity of teaching and educational conflicts.

There are three crucial principles to solve the religious conviction based educational conflicts: 1) *religious liberty*; 2) *right to preserve religious identity*; and 3) *tolerance of religious identity*. Nevertheless, the question is rightly, whether all

¹⁷ II CATHOLIC – ORTHODOX FORUM, *Communiqué*, in *Church and State relations: from Historical and Theological Perspectives* (Atti del II Forum Europeo Cattolico – Ortodosso, Rodi, Grecia, 18-22 ottobre 2010), Bologna, 2011. 215–221., especially 217. (n. 3).

¹⁸ Manlio BELLOMO: Il Medioevo e l’origine dell’università. In: M. BELLOMO (ed): *Medioevo edito e inedito I. Scholae, Universitates, Studia* (I Libri di Erice 20/1), Roma, 1997. 15–30.

¹⁹ Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: La fondazione delle università nel medioevo e le particolarità dell’insegnamento universitario. *Folia Theologica et Canonica*, III, (25/17), [2014], 123–134.

²⁰ Cf. Bernard ARDURA – Gérard CHOLVY – Carinal BILLÉ: *Le Concordat entre Pie VII et Bonaparte*, Paris, 2001. 17–42., especially 17–21.

²¹ About the nature and effect of secularization, cf. WEIGELT, B. D., *Understanding the Impact of Secularism Within the Liberal International Order*, in *Journal of Church & State* 61/1 (2019) 106–123., especially 108–110.

²² Jo TOLLEBEEK – LIESBET NYS: *The city on the hill: a history of Leuven University 1968-2005*. Leuven, 2006.

²³ Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: *Religious Education of the Catholic Church, since the 18th century from canonical and ecclesiastical law aspects*, *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* (under press).

three of these principles can be applied at the same time, and whether they can be carried out within all three systems? Our answer, after a circumspect consideration of the different systems and cases:

- a) regarding some general (basic) religious teaching – which are similar in all major religions – our answer can be affirmative.
- b) regarding the more detailed – distinctive – religious teaching, our answer is mostly negative.

IV. Possible solutions

Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* of the Second Vatican Council clearly fixes in 1965:

“[...] Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children [...].”²⁴

Naturally, this statement is generally true regarding all religious beliefs, their preservation and protection during education. At the same time, however, it indicates the primary principle of resolving educational conflicts arising on a religious basis, which must not offend – in the light of the fundamental human right to religious freedom – the inherited religious tradition of the students. Therefore, the possible solution of this type of conflicts should be in harmony with the concrete – recognized – religious tradition and in the same time depends on the particular educational system and its categories. With regard to higher education, we need to keep in mind the different models of that and their special categories: i.e. German-system, French-system, Spanish / Italian-system, Hungarian-system. Nevertheless, there are at least four basic solutions, which at least to alleviate the arisen conflict situations:

- a) toleration of the students’ personal religious heritage in the curriculum of the different subjects and explanation of them, without denying the teacher’s religious identity – this is what traditionally called as *mutual respect*;
- b) application of the ‘team work’ form in the task accomplishment, especially with regard to research work (e.g., within the higher education);
- c) international mobility, which allows to get to know other cultures, forms of thinking, religious beliefs and creates an opportunity to cooperate in achieving a common scholarly or scientific goal without losing the student’s own religious identity;

²⁴ *Conc. Vaticanum II* (1962–1965), Sessio VII (28 oct. 1965), *Declaratio de educatione christiana: Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, 963.

- d) establishing interfaith dialogue “Student Society” in the school – according to the educational level – providing an opportunity for students to learn about and appreciate each other’s different religious traditions.

In addition to the above listed solutions, it is possible to use further options, taking into account the specifics of the educational system and also the students’ individual religious beliefs.

V. Limits of solutions

The description of the history of education and the presentation of contemporary school conflicts – including their possible solutions – clearly show the limits of the possible solutions, especially in the field of resolving conflicts based on the students’ religious beliefs. These are:

- a) constant danger of violation the religious identity of the student;
- b) different religions have different level of tolerance and sensitivity;
- c) unbalanced tolerance is violation of religious identity;
- d) danger of the concrete solutions (which crossing the limits): promoting – inadvertently or intentionally – *indifferentism*.

The essence therefore of handling school conflicts based on religious conviction should be on the basis of religious identity, which must be tolerated and protected.

Conclusion

The religious sphere and the faithful activity of the churches, denominations, etc., have a fundamental impact on the formation of human values of the concrete society as a community of people, which aspects support the needy of their special protection.²⁵ It is also clear – as impact of secularism²⁶ – that the Catholic Church and the other Christian denominations have replied to the transformation of the society with development of a parallel educational system – as compared with the state’ instructional system – in order to guarantee the institutionalized teaching on every level, based on their own religious conviction. Nevertheless, this parallel system has been getting to be more vulnerable during the last decade in many countries – especially in Europe –, particularly because the ‘reinterpretation’ of religious freedom (i.e. ‘post-secularism’).²⁷ At the same time, it also became clear after

²⁵ Cf. Bernard MUNONO MUYEMBE: *Le bien commun et la diaconie: service de l’Église dans la société. Possibles formes de coopération en vue d’un bien-être intégral de la personne humaine*, in *Church and State relations: from Historical and Theological Perspectives*, 191–198.

²⁶ Brian D. WEIGELT: *Understanding the Impact of Secularism*. 112–114. (Church and State, Vol. 61., 2019, 106–123.)

²⁷ Luca MAVELLI – Fabio PETITO: *Towards a Postsecular International Politics*. In: Luca MAVELLI et al. (ed.): *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New forms of Community, Identity, and Power*, New York, 2014. 2.

World War II, that the so-called parallel educational systems can become a serious source of tension within the society and fail to achieve the originally intended goal, namely the widespread credible transmittance of the concrete religious beliefs.²⁸ It seems therefore, that this system – which was designed primarily as remedy of a fragmentation of the unified Christianity, and widespread of secularization as effect of the Enlightenment – cannot protect the independent religious identity among the rapidly altering circumstances and conditions of 21st century. Deliberating those several school conflicts which are in relation with religious conviction, and which arise in all of the three main educational systems (state, private, ecclesiastical) it is necessary to reconsider some earlier institutional forms of ecclesiastical education²⁹ – instead the increasingly difficult maintaining of the parallel system – within the own structure of the Church (e.g., parish-system³⁰), wherein the people can freely study, following their own faith and traditions. In this way, they will be able to enrich their community and the entire human society with their lasting values, based on virtues³¹, by living their own religious identity properly.

²⁸ Cf. William J. BAUSCH: *The Parish of the Next Millennium*, Mystic, CT. 2000. 7–34.

²⁹ Cf. Szabolcs A. SZUROMI: *Nouvelles formes possibles du système éducatif catholique et transmission institutionnelle de l'identité catholique parmi les conditions sociales changées du XXI^e siècle* [Videoconference of Theology and Canon Law XVII] (Budapest – Tours – Roma: March 4th 2021).

³⁰ BAUSCH op. cit. 157–165.

³¹ SZUROMI, Szabolcs A.: Erények vagy értékek? In: PUSKÁS – PERENDY – LÉVAI op. cit. 259–260.