

FORMAL EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF FAMILY

Dorin Opreș, Assist. Prof., PhD, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia

Abstract: The pedagogical literature emphasises in particular the parents influence on children, on moral and religious issues, which enters the naturalness of things. If we look at the issue from the perspective of parents of high school students that have not studied religion in a formal environment, as a subject, it is important to analyse the existence of some influences regarding the religious life of the family, coming from children towards their parents. This was the main goal of the research conducted by us, which aimed to test the hypothesis that formal religious education influences the types of religious activities from the family.

Keywords: *family, religious education, society, students, curriculum*

Contextualisation and research data

The marginalisation of the contemporary family values system is highlighted by a series of research¹. The results of a questionnaire-based survey conducted in France in 1993 reveals that 42% of respondents believe that the family feeling decreased in value in French society over the past 20 years, and 52% think that it should be protected or restored in the future². In the research on youth values, conducted in 2010 by the Association Euro26, family, although placed first in a list of eight values, received less than 55.3% of respondents' vote³.

Exposed to the economic insecurity and the increasing media attacks, the family heads towards an unprecedented crisis. The fragmentation of affective relations among its members is the main factor of family abandonment, domestic violence, divorce, incest etc. The current socio-economic contexts led to the accelerated relativization of moral values in the public and private sectors, especially in understanding the complex issues related to sexuality, one of the consequences being the increasing of the vulnerability of the family morality versus the laxity of the consumer society, that profoundly affects one of the functions of the most important pillars of education.

Based on these facts and the role that religious values play in the family, we started a research in which we wanted to identify ways in which high school students, beneficiaries of a significant number of years of study of the discipline of religion, influence the religious life of their family members. We were also interested in highlighting some functional models for the future stages of the curriculum design in Romania, based on the motivations that high school students give related to the religious concerns of parents⁴.

¹ Teofil Tia, *Elemente de "Pastorală misionară" pentru o societate post-ideologică*, Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2003, p.71.

² Vasile Bunescu, *Școala și valorile morale*, București: Didactică și Pedagogică, 1998, p.101.

³ <http://www.euro26.ro/e26/2010/10/sondaj-2010/> (The last internet page used in the writing of this article:10.04.2015)

⁴ Sam A. Hardy, Gustavo Carlo, *Religiosity and prosocial behaviours in adolescence: the mediating role of prosocial values*, in *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2005, pp.245-246.

The sample surveyed consisted of 820 high school students in Alba County, 51.95% girls and 48.05% boys, a nationally representative percentage⁵. The plateau age of the sample of subjects has 6 stages, with percentage values below 3% for 14 to 19 years. The other four stages have values in the range 20-30%. Besides, the distribution on grades is balanced, the percentages enrolling in the range stated above: 24.4% (IXth Grade), 26.1% (Xth Grade), 24.1% (XIth Grade), 25.4% (XIIth).

The analyses that we planned required to collect data from respondents concerning the social status of the parents. In equal percentages (64%), both parents of the students surveyed had a job at the time of completing the questionnaire. The difference to 100 is the lack of a job, 10 percentage points higher for mothers than fathers. Being unemployed and retired registered a difference under 2 percentage points between the two parents and the fact that one or both parents live abroad is higher by 3 points in the case of fathers. At least 4% of the students are orphans of one parent.

Two more aspects considered in characterising the sample were the parents' marital status, respectively the climate of relationships in the family. Almost 85% of students have married parents. The difference to 100 students is divided between the divorced parents (11.5%) and those with unmarried parents (3.7%). A percentage of 77.8% of the students live in a family environment characterised by rare, minor and transient disputes. More severe forms of aggression occur in the case of 17% of students, in the case of 5%, the recorded cases are of physical violence. A rate of 5% of students mentioned other situations or relationships that absolutise their own family or reveal serious cases of domestic violence.

The effectiveness of the religious experience, manifested through the frequency with which students go to church, not necessarily when there is a service going on, is within the available data at national level⁶: 26.6% of students go to church weekly; at least once a month, 34.6%, and less often, the difference of 40 percentage points to 100, of which 18.8% only on major Christian feasts.

Analysis of survey data

The influences at the educational level are considered, in most cases, vectorially, the direction of the analysis being from the teacher to the pupil. Talking about influences on family members coming from the bottom up, requires the manifestation of a set of behaviours in children in terms of spiritual life, that are constant over time and they are the effect of the option of informed choice, freedom of decision responsibly assumed⁷.

The survey data will be analysed according to different variables, especially those presented in the characterisation of the sample: gender, class, age, parental social status, marital status of parents, the family relationship, the frequency of participation in church. Because in our selected sample the gender differences are not statistically significant, because

⁵ According to the 2011 census, the population of Romania is represented by 51.6% women and 48.7% men (<http://www.ziare.com/social/recensamant/singurul-judet-din-romania-unde-sunt-mai-multi-barbati-decat-femei-1186168>).

⁶ M. Cuciureanu, S. Velea (eds.), *Educația moral-religioasă în sistemul de educație din România*, București: Didactică și Pedagogică, 2012, p. 52.

⁷ See also: Marin C. Călin, *Teoria și metateoria acțiunii educative, Reconsiderare, adăugiri și demersuri aplicative*, București: Aramis, 2003, p. 61.

the distribution according to the social class the students come from is balanced, the percentage values are calculated related to the total number of students in each category of the data and not to the entire sample so that by summing up the percentages obtained will have a value greater than 100%.

The research reveals that 57.8% of students stated that the religious life of their family was positively influenced by them. Because the formulated item allowed the motivation of the given answer, the qualitative analysis of the negative responses reveals a surprising fact: out of the 346 students that chose the negative response, 83 (10.12%) mentioned that religious values are important in their family, so the influences from parents towards them are stronger.

Student data by gender are shown for comparison in the diagram in Figure 1.

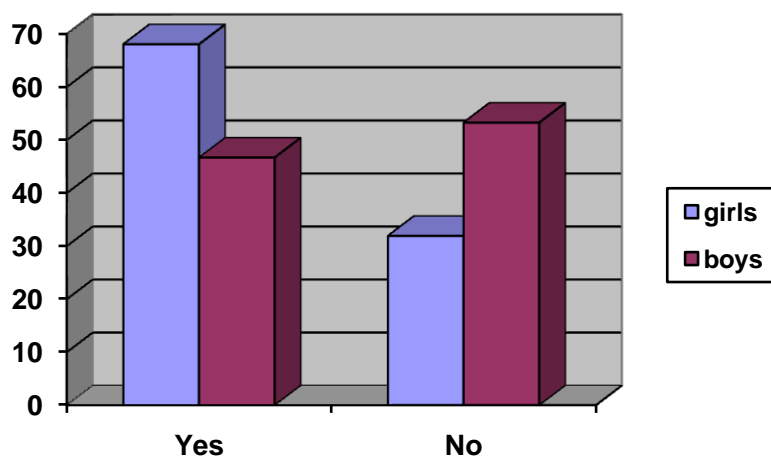


Fig.1. The influence of family religious life by students, according to respondents' gender

The data shows that more than two thirds of girls (68.07%) and almost half of all boys (46.71) chose the positive response. This is related to the frequency and participation in church which is higher in girls than in boys. Data analysis according to **the grade of students** is supported by the distribution curve in Figure 2.

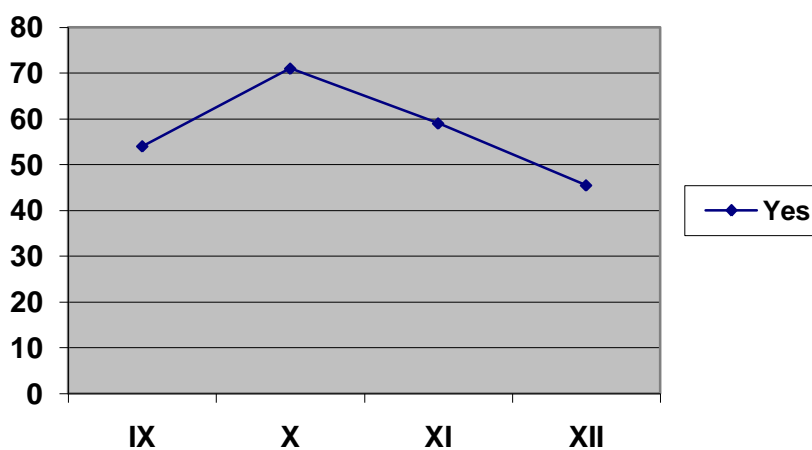


Fig.2. The influence of family religious life, according to the grade of students

The shape of the distribution curve of the percentages of students in each grade which chose the positive response, shows a maximum at the tenth grade (71.02%), with a percentage in XIIth grade, lower by almost 10 percentage points compared to that of IXth grade.

Corroborated with the age of the students, the higher results of Xth grade and XIth grade can be attributed to the manifestation of the crisis of adolescence, also characterised by the desire for moral reform, in this case, religion. In Figure 3 we present the comparison charts to observe the need to change the path of others, depending on the age of each student.

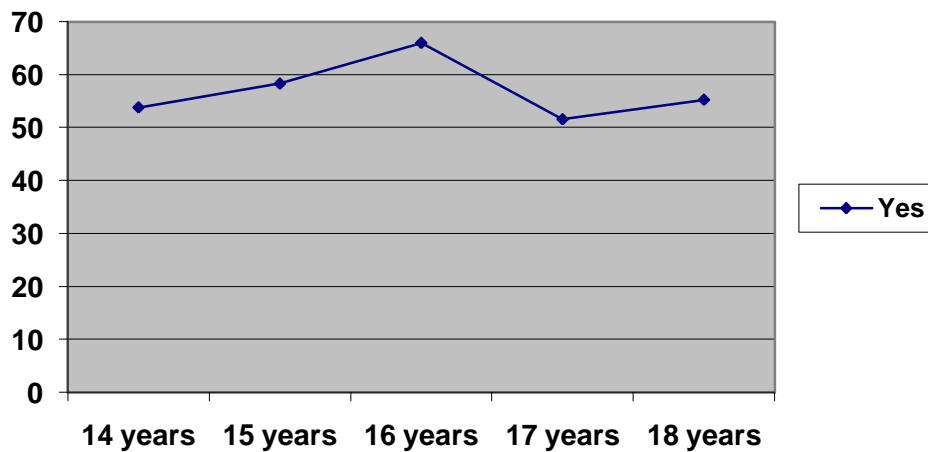


Fig.3. The influence of family religious life, depending on the age of students

Reporting the results to **the frequency of student participation in church** reflects the following fact. As the frequency of participation in the church lowers, the percentage of those who responded affirmatively to the item related to the influence on the religious life of the family, a percentage of 76.7% (for those attending weekly) to 8.86% (for those participating only at major feasts).

The manifestation of the religious life of the family members is strongly influenced by the social status of the parents, as shown in Figure 4.

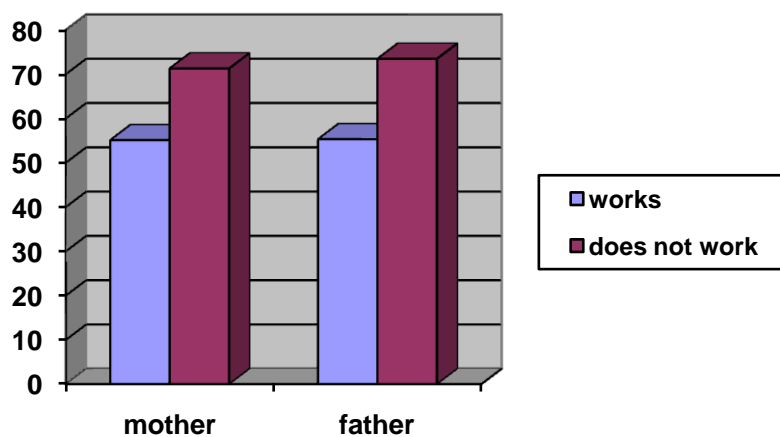


Fig.4. The influence of family religious life according to the social status of the parents

The data in Figure 4 shows that when students spend more time with their parents, either the mother or father, the religious influences are stronger. The students whose parents do not work chose also, 15 percentage points higher, the answer that involves relationship at different levels. It thus reinforces the need to exploit more effectively the time that parents spend with their children.

The analysis by marital status of the parents shows that the total number of students who chose the positive response, 82.70% live with both parents, 12.23% had divorced parents, and the difference to a hundred is given by other situations. But if we look at the results in terms of identifying the percentage of students in each of the two versions mentioned, we observe some differences highlighted in Figure 5.

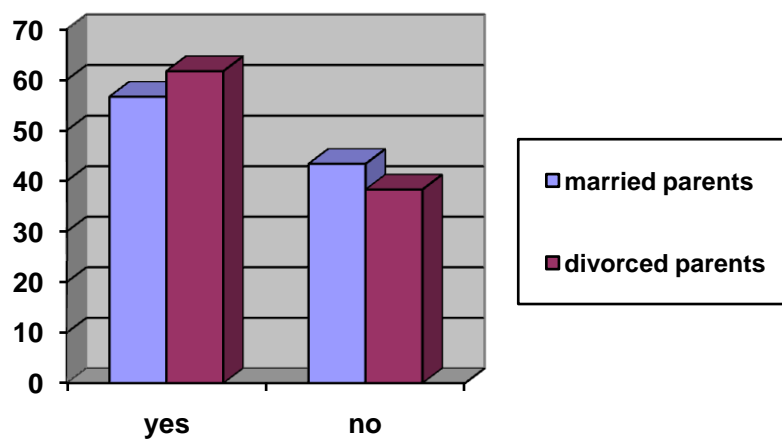


Fig.5. The influence on family religious life, according to the marital status of parents

The comparison charts in Figure 3 show a difference of 5 percentage points for students with divorced parents, related to the influence of the religious life of the family. Moreover, another research conducted by us⁸ indicates positive differences on the expression of the religious sentiment, in dysfunctional families⁹.

This is emphasised by the data analysis depending on **the type of the relations within the family**. The highest percentage of students who have positively influenced the religious life in their family (80%) is recorded in situations where in their families predominate frequent quarrels, accompanied by physical violence.

Conclusions

The influence on the family religious life by the students is an aspect insufficiently investigated. We believe that the acquisition of religious knowledge of high school students, gained from the first year of education is the foundation of most of their religious journey. The way from knowledge to values, attitudes and religious behaviours is one that involves

⁸ Dorin Opreș, Monica Opreș, *Valori, modele și așteptări ale liceenilor din județul Alba*, Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2015, pp.55-71

⁹ Our data are confirmed by the published results from research conducted in the USA: Melinda Lunquist Denton, *Family Structure, Family Disruption, and Profiles of Adolescent Religiosity*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (2012) 51(1), pp.42-44.

significant internal upheaval and involves both the formation of beliefs and responsibly assuming the option regarding their own religious life.

The need for initiating moral reforms, corresponding to the level of personal development in adolescence is emphasised by the results of our research, too, relating it in this case to the changes that students observed regarding the religious life of their own families. The chance given by this availability of high school students to discuss religious matters with elder people - even family members – led by the desire to actively contribute to the building of a more moral society, can be used by forming their communication skills with others, including religious aspects of adult life.

According to high school students, attending church services is the most important religious behavior of a Christian. This is demonstrated by a large number of high school students who say they have influenced the religious life of their family, even if they do not go to church very often. The result is a paradigm shift: going to church is a religious fact among others, such as fasting, prayer, Bible reading, etc. Beyond disavowing their role in the spiritual ascent, the reality mentioned before requires some changes to the curricular level to make possible the understanding of the central role of the Liturgy for the life of a Christian.

The fact that high school students who come from dysfunctional families or families in which there are various forms of violence state that they influenced the religious life of their family members positively, indicates some potential that they have in the emotional balance of the people they live with. This is a subject of future study research - the relationship between the type of religious learning content and the emotional capability to support people in proximity.

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