

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY – CONTENT OF EDUCATION AT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

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Nový rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní školy v České republice, který se zaměřuje na změnu vyučovacího prostředí směrem k větší flexibilitě a dynamice, zavazuje školy k systematickému představení multikulturní výchovy pod termínem mezipředmětové vztahy, které by měly být zahrnuty v různých sférách vzdělávání.

Klíčová slova: Náboženství; kultura; multikultura; náboženská výchova; křesťanství

1. Intercultural Education as a Part of Multicultural Education

New Framework education programmes for elementary education in the Czech Republic with a demanding aim – to change educational atmosphere towards higher flexibility, dynamics and alternative field – oblige schools to systematically introduce multicultural education under the terms of the so-called Cross-Curricular Subject which are those that are supposed to be included in a larger number of different fields of education.

Religion, however, is mentioned as one part of such education only marginally, and only within very general features. That is why I want to deal with the reasons for paying more attention to this topic on the level of individual school educational programmes in a more detailed way. To make them clear, however, let's define basic terms first.

When reflecting goals and means of interreligious education, a concrete environment where education takes place can't be abstracted away. The context which I will take into consideration during this lecture will reflect the situation in the Czech Republic on a background of the situation of other European countries, because the Czech trend in this field can be very informative. In the picture you can see options a child inhabitant of Brno has: in the street he is passing a Christian temple, a Hare Krishna procession, Islamic mosque and he or she can also go to a Jewish cemetery.

2. Defining of Basic Terms

In the most general sense by culture we mean „*everything that a man has created in his historical development, a whole complex of thoughts, opinions and attitudes, both sacral and earthly elements, everyday as well as festive, a whole complex of both material and immaterial estates, artistic objects as well as useful. This includes institutions which we subordinate to or which we create, ways of behaviour and our reactions to behaviour of others even that which we can't observe directly, but which we can feel ... Through culture we evaluate not only what seems wonderful, funny, fair, honest to us but even such philosophical categories as the truth.*”¹ Culture is defined in this wide way for example in a project of NGO Člověk v tísni called Variants, which concretizes a problem of intercultural education for high schools very well.

From this point of view we can distinguish big cultures – like European culture, Arabian culture, Indian culture or African culture. This wide definition has a logical implication that

¹ Člověk v tísni. *Interkulturní vzdělávání. Příručka nejen pro středoškolské pedagogy. Projekt Varianty.* Praha: Lidové noviny, 2002, p. 34.

religion – as a holy element – is inseparable from any culture and that it participates in the building and preservation of society.

According to Christian sociologist Tomáš Bahounek people who form society and culture together with natural environment create religion. This is because human nature is formed by unity of spiritual soul as “shaping basics” and material body as “shaped matter”. That’s why human society includes the same levels in its basis: a spiritual and material one. The material basis is represented by natural environment, the spiritual basis by religion. According to Halík religion is the third part of the basis of every society and culture. It is on these three bases – nature environment, human population and religion – where the further parts of society and culture stand: virtuousness, arts, education, language, theory, law – state, politics – the army, economy, technology.²

Fully religious sociologist and religionist Tomáš Halík doesn’t agree with Bahounek’s thesis that religion as a human’s relation to God becomes a base for building and preservation of society. I quote his book *Vzýván i nevyzván* (Invoked and not invoked): „*Today’s Europe is neither non-Christian or non-religious. In a certain sense it is Christian and in a certain sense it is religious. However, it isn’t religious in a Christian manner. Christianity isn’t a religion of Europe anymore and our European Christianity isn’t a religion anymore.*”³ However, Halík uses completely different definitions of religion than Bahounek. According to him religion – “religio” – is “power which integrates society.” This power is according to Halík represented by the media nowadays. That is why contemporary Europe isn’t non-religious, it has just found its own functional substitutive equivalents for former religious systems. The media plays its role among economic and political institutions but they still won’t have any major competitor for the role “religio” in the upcoming future.⁴

If we accept Halík’s definition of religion and relate it to Bahounek’s general sociological theses we can say that a spiritual base of society, where institutions grow, is represented by collective worshipping of power of some kind which goes beyond society and connects it at the same time but it doesn’t necessarily have to be faith in God. In Czech society there isn’t a God in Christian understanding anymore but, for example, consumerism, production and consumption and mostly media instead. The media have started dictating to people what to buy, what to postpone or where to go on holiday but also what to take care about and who – or what – to believe in, which T. Halík repeatedly points out.⁵

In a relation to God Halík defines the term “faith”: specific, from biblical sources coming from the Christian and Jewish relation to single God. According to him it has firstly an inward dimension, like an act of faith as a means of trust which is confessed by a concrete person and secondly a dimension of faith reflexion as a means of doctrine, orthodoxy (*fides qua creditor*)⁶. Where in the structure of contemporary Czech society are groups of Christians situated then?

Each culture includes many subcultures, thus „*specific groups that are creators and carriers of strange, different norms, values and behaviour patterns and mainly lifestyle even though they participate in the dominant culture and in the functioning of wider community*”⁷ as stated in Variants of the project which I cited before.

² BAHOUNEK, T.: *Křesťanská sociologie pro každého*. Třebíč: Nakladatelství Arca JiMfa, s. r. o., 1997, pp. 81–84.

³ HALÍK, T.: *Vzýván i nevyzván. Evropské přednášky k filozofii a sociologii dějin křesťanství*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2004, pp. 22–23.

⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵ E.g. HALÍK, T.: *Vzýván i nevyzván. Evropské přednášky k filozofii a sociologii dějin křesťanství*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2004.

⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷ *Člověk v úsni. Interkulturní vzdělávání. Příručka nejen pro středoškolské pedagogy. Projekt Varianty*. Praha: Lidové noviny, 2002, p. 36.

If we observe the life of Christian church members under the terms of this definition we can not but come to the opinion that they also confess certain values that aren't confessed by the rest of society (i.e. eternal life, God), they live their specific lifestyle (they celebrate ecclesiastical holy days, they create mostly traditional family communities, they put emphasis on demonstration of solidarity and suchlike) and they obey norms that the rest of society is not subject to (i.e. indissolubility of marriage, inviolability of unborn life).⁸

3. Czech and European Multiculturalism and its Religious Dimension

In contemporary Czech society Christians form a small subculture in terms of number. 32 % of Czechs profess to certain church but only 9 % define their religious faith as faith in a personal God, which is a typical characteristic of Christianity and for example classes of religion at state schools are attended by 5 % of the child population on average.⁹

Meanwhile it is evident that Czech society is multicultural. By multiculturalism we mean a situation when two different sociocultural groups with specific systems of institutions, traditions, attitudes and values live next to each other. Every society in which at least two social groups coexist can be described as multicultural. However, the coexistence of different cultures does not automatically mean that the two groups get along with one another. There may be segregation, discrimination, integration and cooperation.¹⁰

When we observe Czech society we can find members of other cultures here who live besides each other in relatively small groups. These include Jews, Arabs, the Vietnamese but even, for example, Gypsies. It is a situation which presents many opportunities but also many difficulties at the same time. The best-known danger is the hidden but deep belief of the dominant culture members in their superiority, which is the cause of an attitude where they expect only "the others" to change. They are also blamed for their – often bad in some sense – situation. If two cultures or subcultures live together in such distance where they expose themselves to a danger of living with so called "lost information", it means people stop being aware of customs, values or norms of the other groups. And the less they know them, the more fear they have of them. Then they fall prey to prejudices easily that can eventually gain the character of a very negative stereotype. In relation to Christians, particularly Catholics, we can often hear the following negative generalizing statements: "They brought only wars to Europe", "They burnt Jan Hus", "They caused a period of darkness over Europe", "They stole from poor people" etc. On the other hand, even Christians often repeat their stereotypical prejudices against the rest of society: "Society without God is a priori bad and sinful", "There are few of us, Christians, in society, but we live better, only we have a chance to find the meaning of life and the aim of life", "it is just a matter of time until God punishes this sinful world", etc.

Under the terms of his vast work about the nature of prejudices American social psychologist Gordon Allport pointed out that people tend to prejudices in general. He also described a simple scale of demonstration of prejudices. Going from verbal smearing, shunning and discrimination to physical attacking and annihilation.¹¹ In the history of the 20th century people were too often

⁸ BARTOVÁ, I.– SPOUSTA, J.: Bdí nad Čechy Bůh, bůh, anebo Nic? In: *Lidové noviny*, 16. 10. 1990, p. 19 – Orientace.

⁹ PRUDKÝ, L. a kol.: *Religion und Kirchen in Ost (Mittel) Europa: Tschechien, Kroatien, Polen*. Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2001.

¹⁰ Člověk v tísní. *Interkulturní vzdělávání. Příručka nejen pro středoškolské pedagogy. Projekt Varianty*. Praha: Lidové noviny, 2002, p. 12.

¹¹ ALLPORT, G.: *O povaze předsudků*. Praha : Prostor, 2004, p. 46–47.

victims of violence which had its origin in this irrational human tendency. Religion has also been too often the arena in which these tragedies have taken place. However Allport convincingly shows that no religion in itself a priori includes any values which would support the formation of prejudices. According to him this is more a problem of applying an ethnocentric factor in religion which supports a lifestyle tainted by prejudices and exclusivity instead of applying a universalistic factor which causes an infusion of ideals of brotherhood into human thinking and behaviour.¹²

4. Interreligious Education as a Part of Intercultural Education

From this simple interpretation it is apparent that the state as a social institution will strive to make interreligious education a part of multicultural education because it is concerned with conservation of stability in society which could be seriously disturbed by extreme demonstration of prejudices. Nowadays – according to Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations – not only keeping individual civilizations is concerned but keeping the Civilization as such.¹³ Meanwhile it is a fact that only people who understand their own culture can also understand the culture of others, and they are able not to be an easy target for political propagandas leading to intolerance and conflict. And only a man having reached adult demonstrations of own religiosity won’t succumb to his own or other religion members’ ethnocentric argumentation.

In this connection I want to deal with the European context, in which the problem of interreligious education under the terms of multicultural Europe is being discussed more and more urgently both at the level of experts and politicians. As an example we can take an international conference that took place in June 2004 in Oslo, Norway, as an European Council conference called “Interreligious dimension of intercultural education”. Out of many notable contributions that were presented I pick a statement of the Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik: “*In response to 11th September in New York and Washington the European Council expressed their resolve to “promote wide intercultural and interreligious dialogue to allow our society to find greater cohesiveness and to reduce risks of misunderstanding.”* According to the Prime Minister this resolution of the European Council doesn’t relate only to governments of individual countries but a need of engaging the entire civic society arises. And here the school environment, after family (whose importance of possible religion prejudices was pointed out by Allport), seems to be very important.¹⁴

It seems that a simple reflexion of sociological presumptions and contemporary European reality brings us to a problem:

How to communicate about religion and religious values with children and young people who don’t have any experience with religion and religious form of language because they are members of the majority society where no official religion is confessed, and a substitute way of religious thinking, feeling and behaving has been accepted?

In the European area the problem of multiculturalism is concretized as an educational topic in three different ways which are always characteristic for specific countries. They differ in the prefix “inter”, “intra”, “multi”, which is put in front of the collocation “cultural education”:

¹² Ibid., p. 471.

¹³ HUNTINGTON, S. P.: *Sřet civilizací. Boj kultur a proměna světového řádu*. Praha: Rybka Publishers, 2001, p. 367–388.

¹⁴ BONDEVIK, K. M.: *Council of Europe Conference on the religious dimension in intercultural education*. Soria Mوريا Conference Centre, Oslo 7. June 2004. <http://www.norway-coe.org/NR/rdonlyres/53AACD0C-2DF8-48...> (retrieved on 8. 1. 2007)

- „multi“ – we mediate mainly knowledge about various cultures with a distance, with a view from above, in their plurality that doesn't touch either us or our pupils: we learn about the others
- “inter” – we lead pupils to understanding and reciprocal enrichment on the basis of knowledge of other cultures and religions: we learn from each other
- “intra” – pupils learn to understand deeper their own culture, meanwhile it is not supposed they could be seriously touched during their life by any other culture that would cross their attitudes and values.

Framework education programmes i.e. for elementary education define this aspect of school education as multicultural education on one hand, however a relatively demanding goal is formulated rather towards intercultural education: pupils are supposed to “*understand other cultures, develop a sense for justice, solidarity, tolerance....*”¹⁵

If it is valid that multi-, inter- and intercultural learning has its own religious dimension then we have to be interested in the didactical concretization of this religious dimension in the next step. A Belgian religious pedagogue, Bert Roebben, deals with this. He proceeds mainly from questions pupils should identify with, for example, “How could I actually learn something, if there was no variety? Where do you come from, who are you and what do you believe in?” According to him precisely defined moments in education occur when they get to a level of differences in interpretation. Thanks to this a pupil or a student can state: “You are different from me, you are a challenge for my imagination, your thoughts inspire mine, your manners are unknown to me but I want to get to know you, how do you want to treat me? This is me and who are you?”

According to him there are three didactical principles that have to be adhered to during the lesson:

- Learning in coming together
- Learning „in presence of the others” (Mary Boys)
- Learning in difference

Learning <i>about</i> religion	Learning <i>from</i> religion	Learning <i>into</i> religion
<i>Multi</i> -religious learning	<i>Inter</i> - religious learning	<i>Intra</i> - religious learning
Knowledge of others	Respecting others	Knowledge/self respect
Documentation	Communication	Integration
Heuristic competence	Social competence	Existential competence

B. Roebben talks in this connection about the deepening of the multi- and inter-religious dimension of learning into a very open inter-religious form. This way significantly deepens the dynamics of learning by hermeneutic dynamics via communicative exchanges among pupils in a class. Here the hermeneutic dimension means a possibility to take a look into the inner structure of religious experience of “the other”, to participate in it in a certain rate. “The other one” in this case isn't “the generalized other one” anymore (classic sacred text or great tradition of some religion) but he or she is the actual other one, the one who sits opposite me (my classmates’ “text”, traditions in their own mind, way in which they celebrate their religious feasts...). Open inter-religious learning doesn't provide first and foremost a view on a certain

¹⁵ *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání*. Praha: VÚP, 2007, p. 97–98. http://www.vuppraha.cz/soubory/RVPZV_2007-07.pdf-Win (retrieved on 19. 11. 2009).

religion from a foreign perspective but rather in its inner dynamics a search for what is important for young people in communication with other people.

This critical coming together fortifies retrospectively an ability to have a deeper look into my own system that gives me a life sense and to investigate further existential resistance offered by this system. Like one student stated many years ago during discussion: “I’ll tell you what my faith in God gives to me, tell me what your unfaith gives to you.” Through open inter-cultural and open inter-religious meeting I am invited to redefine and re-evaluate myself, get to know myself better and respect myself better as a human being with dignity that is different in meeting with others. In this didactical model of teaching and learning, the teacher and pupils learn mainly from a difference (in Czech circumstances mainly a difference on the poles “believing pupil – in a Christian manner believing pupil – nonbeliever pupil”) which is present in a school class (thus in “known territory”). The way of learning is typically inductive (learning “from the specific to the general”), and it happens while the situation of mutual meeting is emphasized.¹⁶

From how we described the problem of opening the religious world to pupils in three areas it is apparent that a conception where multi- and intra- religious learning is subordinated to a level of open inter-religious learning, which has a noticeably dialogic character, it doesn’t aspire to emphasizing exclusivity of one world view (or religion) compared to others but it leads to reciprocal understanding and awareness of enrichment of own identity coming from a meeting, has to be concerned. It is evident that under Czech conditions neither the state nor churches aspire to such a form of inter-religious meeting on the educational ground of a school. This contribution wishes to point out the fact that this is to the detriment of everybody involved.

Shrnutí

Dialog kultury s křesťanstvím – obsah výuky na základních a středních školách?

Autorka definuje náboženství jako část základní kultury. Popisuje vícenáboženskou situaci v České republice. Představuje tři postoje k mezináboženskému a kulturnímu vzdělání v Evropě.

¹⁶ ROEBBEN, B.: *Teaching Religion in a multicultural European Society*. A paper at TRES Launching Conference, Uppsala, March 31, 2006.