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***Confessional Education - a bridge between Churches and Religions.
The Transylvanian case***

Confessional education in Romania after the fall of communism has been facing constant transformations over the past few years. From the traditional seminaries, to religious education in public schools and theological higher-education, all these forms of instruction are marked by a certain tension between the Church's need to prepare theologians for its own clerical organizations, and the more general purpose of raising awareness for the social role played by the Church in society, by educating young people from various domains, other than those related to the ecclesiastical space.

Romania is a member of the European Union. At the same time, according to last census, it is very religious. It is also a nation placed between East and West, where the ecumenical relations have an interesting dynamic, characterized by both an acceptance of the inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogues and also a firm resistance to them, with even an anti-ecumenical movement arising in the past few years. What brought together all Churches and religions in contemporary Romania was the confessional education. In this field, in spite of all the differences, the Churches and religions worked in the same direction.

Just after the change of regime in 1989, all religious communities were interested in promoting their beliefs in the Romanian post-communist society. Until the new Law of National Education (LNE) form 2011, confessional education was assimilated to theological education. The new LNE defines what we call public confessional education¹, as well as the status of the religious education in the public schools. While in Cluj, one of the major cities in Transylvania, the ethnical, confessional and religious diversity is a traditional one, with communities living side by side for centuries. There are other Romanian communities that have recently begun to confront with a different type of diversity, brought about by migration and free movement. This is a more radical type of diversity, with stronger cultural and religious differences, where the attempt to harmonize those forced to share the same space cannot be done without considerable efforts. The permanent exposure to heterogeneous cultural phenomena cultivates tolerance and mutual understanding, on one hand, but also a certain kind of relativism towards values. Under such circumstances, religious education plays an important part in preserving the cultural and religious identity of the community.

Given the legal framework, but also the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Romanian context, the purpose of this paper is to offer an overview of the confessional education in Transylvania as a way of the ecumenical dialog.

Cluj-Napoca is a university city *par excellence*. „Babes-Bolyai” University is the largest university in the country, with over 45,500 students, 105 specializations (out of which 98 are in Romanian, 52 in Hungarian, 13 in German and 4 in English), three official languages, and the only European university with four faculties of Theology of four different confessions (Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Roman-Catholic and Reformed).

¹ Art. 15 (2), art. 19 (5), art. 60, Law 1/2011 (LEN) – Law of National Education.

The schooling sector in Cluj-Napoca is organized in 211 units. Among them there are 7 state confessional high-schools: 1. The Orthodox Theological Seminary; 2. "Emanuel"; Baptist Theological High-School; 3. "Inocentiu Micu" Greek-Catholic Theological High School ; 4. „Maranatha" Adventist Theological High-School; 5. The Reformed Theological High-School; 6. The Roman-Catholic Theological High School; 7. „Janos Zsigmond" Unitarian Theological High School.

In this broad context, the general competences, the values and attitudes promoted by the religious education in Romania are identical, regardless of the religion or confession the schools belong to. Here are, for example, some of the competences included in the National Curriculum for the school subject *Religion*: 1. Defining the specificity of each religion in relation to other faiths; 2. Adequate use of specific concepts in various communicative contexts; 3. Integrating values and religious knowledge into students' attitudes and behavior; 4. Putting knowledge into practice in both personal and community life; 5. Correlating religious knowledge to knowledge acquired in other school subjects. Values and attitudes: 1. Becoming aware of the role of the Church teachings in personal and community life; 2. Developing respect towards Church and the holy; 3. Assuming one's own religious identity; 4. Behaving responsibly when exercising rights and obligations resulting from belonging to different identities (confession, nation, community, profession, culture, etc.); 5. Treating those of a different faith with respect and understanding; 6. Caring for the others; 7. Developing an interest for religious knowledge for a permanent spiritual growth"². All these competences reveal the level of ecumenical understanding of the confessional education.

Even though there were voices that asked for a non-confessional education or a general Christian ethics, and despite the fact that there were no official dialogues among all the Christian communities from Romania, the decision for a confessional type of education was unanimous. The general opinion considered confessional education more appropriate, and I will mention here just a few reasons:

1. Religiosity is a subjective expression of faith in the existence of an absolute reality that shapes man and society. For this reason, it is necessary to assume at a personal level the religious manifestation and the confession of faith (and religion as a school subject is part of this entire process).

2. Teaching religion through a neutral channel would make the religious education disappear and be reduced to a school subject that aims at informing students on religious related matters or turn it into History of Religions or History and philosophy of religious faiths.

3. Since in Romania religious education is under a double subordination – Ministry of Education and the Church or the ecclesiastical organization – the non-confessional approach would be unnatural, since the confessional and didactical preparation of those teaching religion is confirmed through the „approval of the denomination”.

4. We thus think that in the contemporary society, confessional education that responds to the ethnical and confessional diversity of the community by assuming the same set of values and attitudes is the only form of theological education with an ecumenical character.

In conclusion, religious education in Romania is and should remain confessional. The tradition of the Romanian religious or theological education, together with the relatively large number of confessional schools opened in Cluj, due to the pluri-religious context in the region, may be a proof for this fact. This type of education is in accordance with the declared religiosity of the Romanian citizens and with the recognized social and educational role played by the Church. Confessional religious education, with its two directions of development represents a traditional, yet an appropriate form of ecumenical religious education.

² Annex no. 3 to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research, no. 3458 / 09.03.2004 and Annex no. 2 to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 3252/ 13.02.2006 and Annex no. 3 to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 4598/31.08.2004, <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/curriculum/c556+589/?startnum=2>, accessed on March 4, 2013