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Russia: Change of Paradigms in Religious Education

Angesichts der Möglichkeiten, Entwicklungen in der Religionspädagogik pessimistisch („Allgemeiner Niedergang an Werten“), neutral (als generell an neuzeitlichen Umbrüchen partizipierend) oder optimistisch zu betrachten, entschließt sich F. Kozyrev, einmal die letztgenannte Perspektive einzunehmen. Er beschreibt die Chancen, die damit gegeben sind, dass sich religiöse Erziehung im öffentlichen Schulwesen von kirchlicher Dominanz emanzipiert, dass die nüchterne Wahrnehmung von Säkularisation einen unbefangeneren Blick auf die Bedeutung der Religionen ermöglicht, dass Religionsphänomenologie, Religionspsychologie und Hermeneutik einer schülernahen Begegnung mit Religionen entgegen kommen. Als eine primär im pädagogischen Feld angesiedelte Disziplin kann sie die kulturelle wie die existentielle Relevanz religiöser Fragestellungen artikulieren. Kozyrev spricht hier von dem „humanitären Paradigma“ religiöser Erziehung und greift die von Michael Grimmitt eingebrachte Unterscheidung von „learning religion“, „learning about religion“ und „learning from religion“, mit der das starre Gegenüber von bloß konfessionalistischem und bloß religionskundlichem Unterricht überwunden werden kann. Im Blick auf die Gegebenheiten in Russland benutzt er in Analogie dazu die Typologie „religion as a *law*, as a *fact*, and as a *gift*“ (wiederzugeben vielleicht mit „Religion als dogmatisches System, als Faktor in der Gesellschaft, als Gabe/Angebot für die Kinder). Auch wenn er eindeutig den in England entwickelten „non confessional approach“ religiöser Erziehung befürwortet, hält er einen auf das Leben und die Bedürfnisse der Kinder bezogenen Zugang zu den Religionen auch als Perspektive für einen Religionsunterricht, der konfessionell erteilt wird (bzw. zu erteilen ist) für hilfreich.

1. Evolutionary approach

First of all I would like to state that I hate the new habit of my Russian colleagues to use the term ‘paradigm’ any time they want to present some new pedagogical idea or approach. It seems to me that the term has been so often misused during last decades that irritation can be the only healthy reaction on hearing it again. Hence my decision to employ the term was not occasional but came as a consequence of a firm confidence in a paradigmatic quality of the changes that have taken place in the pedagogy of religious education in the second half of the XX century. By paradigmatic quality I mean mainly two things: that the changes were revolutionary and that they were progressive. I will reflect upon the two, beginning with the second.

In fact the evaluation of the new movements in RE, such as non-confessional approaches, is tightly connected with the whole comprehension of the development of our

civilization. Three different visions are possible. First, the pessimistic one tends to describe the direction of our development as a mere decline or cultural degradation with secularization as the moving force of this sad process. No doubt there are reasons to see things in this gloomy light and there are strong arguments supporting this view. I cannot but make an allusion to a brilliant G.K. Chesterton definition of the contemporary world as a world 'full of wild and wasted virtues' of the old Christian virtues that had gone mad being isolated from each other and are wandering alone (1909, p. 50). Yes the last century brought some new level of oddness in spiritual life and a new level of alienation that are recognized as new global challenges by many distinguished thinkers. The only problem with this vision is that obviously not everything had got worse and it means that there is still an active source of growth and resistance to degradation in this world.

The second vision is more neutral. Those who share this vision describe reality in a more positive way and explain, where possible, social and cultural changes as a result of a necessary and natural adaptation to the conditions of the postmodern. According to this view Christian commitments are challenged mostly 'from outside', that is by the new factual circumstances created through scientific and technical progress and not by the internal corrosion of the human spiritual life.

The third vision sticks to an optimistic account of recent history as a positive development of Christian ideas and as a continuing growing up in response to revelation. The problem with RE is that very few theologians choose the third way to look at its history. That's why the issues of teaching religion at school are usually considered within the framework of new challenges instead of new opportunities. Theologians are much more inclined to discuss how to pursue the secularization of school or moral relativism than what to employ among the newest achievements of science, educational philosophy, theory and practice in order to strengthen and improve mission. And there is much to employ indeed, even on the spiritual level. According to the optimistic vision of history it is necessary to talk not only about hazards of secularity but also about 'blessings of secularity' as John Hull called in one of his latest papers (2003). And to keep closer to RE, it is necessary to acknowledge, following J. Hull again (W. Mejer 2006, p. 88), that the spirit of enquiring and testing criticism inherent to the new non-catechetical forms of RE is in harmony not only with the natural curiosity of the child but also with the Kingdom of God as it was proclaimed by the Scripture and professed by the early church (1 Thess 5.21).

To use an analogy with biology, it is very important for pedagogues to get rid of both simplistic views on the evolution of RE as either a straight progress or a mere adaptation. Those familiar with principal biological problems know that the epigenetic accent on adaptive capability of organisms comes into contradiction with the attempts to explain how the progressive development is possible. Something similar happens in the theory of RE. So often one can find in the scientific literature the explanation of the new developments in RE as a reaction to the growing pluralism and multicultu-

ralism caused by immigration. In my opinion, to accept this way of thinking means to deny the progressive nature of new movements and approaches. It means that if immigrants come back to their home countries or organize closed subcultures within the modern culture of Europe, the Christians of Europe would have all reason to return to the medieval catechetical practice. But it is not so. There are irreversible changes in the volume and quality of knowledge obtained by human beings about the world around, about themselves, and about the process of getting this knowledge. The fallibility of scientific knowledge and its dependence on socio-cultural and even on political context, the pluralism of axiomatic systems including logics, the essential unavoidability of implicit subjective assumptions from experience and its interpretations – all these new epistemological findings taken together with the fantastic leap in technology and information call for a new vision of human spirituality distinct from both Medieval trust in human helplessness and veneration of human mind that opened the Modern age. The new movements in RE are caused in large part by these profound changes.

2. Progress in RE

Now if one asks what is really progressive in the new approaches to teaching and learning religion at school, I would say that it is what might be called the educational grounding of RE. RE became one among the other topics and subjects of pedagogical science and practice, and it is really a paradigmatic change. According to Thomas Kuhn (1970), the first emergence of a scientific paradigm is accompanied by the foundation of special journals and of professional societies and by the appeals for the special courses of lectures in the academic curricula. It is exactly what has happened in the field of RE since the 1970s.

Paul Hirst was one of the first in England who proclaimed the autonomous character of RE and its independence from the Church. According to him ‘any justifiable form of RE must be justified entirely on educational grounds’ and ‘all valid theology can do is generate the view in which the autonomous enterprise of education fits’ (Hirst 1976, p. 156). As a response to this new vision a wide and hot discussion on the justifiability of school RE and religious upbringing of children has been launched in the philosophy of education (McLaughlin T. 1984, 1985; Callan E. 1985, Gardner 1988, 1991; Hand M. 2002). In the course of these movements the deeper level of integration between religion and other components of school curriculum was achieved. Religious educators recognized themselves and were recognized by their school colleagues as members of the pedagogical community instead of the ‘educational arm of the churches’ (Bates 1996, p. 95). It meant, as N. Smart put it, that the teacher became ‘primarily responsible to the community of scholars rather than to any other social body’ and that he would not ‘use his position to advance any cause other than that of responsible scholarship’ (Schools Council 1971, p. 27). The search for *educational criteria* to ground RE (Grimmitt 1973, p. 9) led to a new level of openness, self-criticism and reflection that had also obvious positive effect in practice by helping religious educators to see more distinctly their role in school. For many of them it appeared clear at least that, as Karl-

Ernst Nipkow puts it (1995), the tasks of RE should be more modest than they had been before.

By scrutinizing the ethic-pedagogical and didactical problems interwoven with teaching religion at school, the disadvantages of confessional catechetical approaches were unveiled. Some of them had been known before, for instance the underestimation of pedagogical criteria in appointment of the teachers. The Russian pedagogue Modzalevsky wrote in the 1870s that a good theologian might be a very bad pedagogue and if so, he should no more have the right to teach religion at school than any lawyer or dentist. Recently an American scholar G. Moran (1994) drew attention to another aspect of the problem of theology dominance in RE. He showed how RE is controlled by theology through the usage of theological language and how this language creates an alienation of students from the teacher and from the subject of study.

The acceptance of pedagogical standards in RE implied the relocation of accent from the issues of proper representation of teaching material to the issues of its relevance to the children's abilities to receive it. Thus the achievements of developmental psychology came into the field and special investigation on children's perception of the theological concepts and on personal religious development were demanded and carried out beginning with R. Goldman's early work on the religious thinking of children (1964). That gave a powerful impulse to improve methods of teaching and to focus on the developmental function of RE. J. Fowler's 'Stages of Faith' (1984) should be also mentioned here as an extraordinary important and challenging attempt to apply the best achievements of developmental psychology to the sphere of individual religious life.

A shift from the theological to the pedagogical domain stimulated interdisciplinary cooperation in the field of RE and as a result new methodological resources for innovation were opened. Among them the most prominent role belonged to the phenomenology of religion. The recognition of religious knowledge as essentially *participating knowledge* (Bettis 1969, p. 34) generated a historical process of reconciliation of theology with religious science that opened a possibility for theologians and religious ministers to deal sympathetically with scientific criticism and for scientists to do the same with religious commitments. By attempting to bring together particular academic disciplines that used to study religion from very different points of reference, a sort of 'intellectual schizophrenia of scholastic compartmentalization' (Bettis 1969, p. 2) was minimized too and that allowed students to get more holistic vision of religious phenomena. The idea to employ a phenomenological approach in school RE was strongly criticized from several points but as R. Jackson fairly proved, these criticisms in general 'are not valid as objections to phenomenology *per se*, but they are applicable to some poorly designed materials described by their authors as phenomenological' (Jackson 2002, p. 12). The works of phenomenologists made, according to Jackson, a solid contribution to the development of RE didactics through emphasizing the view that the insider's testimony is the key source for grasping a religious way of life (*ibid*, p. 24).

The other trend of pedagogical innovation received its impulse from hermeneutics. This trend of development was closely connected with the employment of the phenomenology of religion as soon as the latter became more inclined to identify the core elements of its method of investigation not with 'bracketing presuppositions' in the course of phenomenological reduction according to original Husserl's design, but with the disclosure and fixation of these presuppositions in the course of oscillating procedure of interpretation. With the assimilation of the ideas of C. Geertz, H. Gadamer, P. Ricoeur and other distinguished scholars in humanities, empathy and intuition as a means for understanding religious phenomena were substituted in their leading position by the hermeneutical circle, thick interpretation and other techniques based upon the idea of intercultural and inter-textual communication as a way to approach the meanings. This theoretical and methodological development encouraged interpretive methods of RE and advanced dialogical forms of teacher-student interaction.

Developments in the philosophy of science and education had definite positive effect on RE both for justifying its presence in the school curriculum and for the capacity of teachers to deal with difficult issues of interrelation between religion and science and of the epistemological status of scientific and religious truths.

All these processes can hardly be estimated in terms of decline. Rather one can say that while transforming into the educationally grounded interdisciplinary and inter-confessional enterprise, the old confessional RE acquires a better chance to be equipped with up-to-date educational techniques for representation and interpretation of religious life and for fostering positive attitudes among the youngsters toward religion.

3. The direction of movement

The next question is how the change of paradigms in RE corresponds to the general development of our culture and civilization. I suppose that it is hardly possible to find something special in the route of development of this particular part of culture. It just follows the same path after science, arts, philosophy and education in general and its postponement is just a sign of its inertness. As much as school education is one of the most conservative parts of culture, religious education proved to be the most conservative part of schooling. I think that the processes taking place in RE can be described without huge simplification precisely as the shift from theocentric to anthropocentric frame of reference that had already taken place in arts, science and different dimensions of civil life by the time of Enlightenment. This led to what is called usually Humanism in European culture. But besides the rise of status of the human being in the system of values, humanization included another element, that of the rise of the individual. In conjunction with the reconceptualization of God-human relations the person-society relations came into consideration and growing individualism became a mark of post-Medieval European culture. This trend also echoed in RE with a good delay. It was already recognized in the 19th century by progressive pedagogues, but became commonly accepted only now, that after society step by step rejected the

absolutism of religious ideas, traditions and other historical forms of consolidation, with collective and continual ‘Self’ beginning to die off in the more discrete world, the authoritarian way of teaching religion lost its power to make an individual a partaker of commonwealth and common responsibility. That is why it turned in the eyes of learners into the manifestation of clerical power or unfair superiority of the teacher’s individual will.

So it would be useful to resolve the vector of European development into two, both having a cognitive dimension. Two questions – what is the source of knowledge and what is the preferable object of cognitive activity – form a variety of answers that can be used as an epistemological frame of reference or coordinated system for the description of the evolution of the idea of education (table 1). The idea of liberal education being tightly linked with the ideal of the personal rational and moral autonomy corresponds to the left field in our scheme. It is contrary to the idea of education as a component of Church life, based not on the natural capacity of human beings to obtain knowledge and recognize truths, but on the supernatural power of Revelation. Emancipation of science and school was the crucial point in the formation of cultural paradigm of Modern and evolution of pedagogical ideas was a part of the process. The formation of non-confessional RE is but a last and consistent step in this movement.

But looking from the other perspective we find another subset. Lev Modzalevsky already cited above, wrote that in the history of pedagogy of the 17th-18th centuries we can trace a movement that was ‘in opposition but not in contradiction’ to the struggle for the school based on empirical knowledge and oriented toward positive science. That was the movement toward the school based on humanistic values and oriented toward personality. Pietism in the beginning and existentialism later were among the main sources of inspiration for those at the head of this movement. According to our scheme, this movement went a perpendicular direction to the empiricist-positivistic one and caused a tension that finally led to the problem of the *Two Cultures* as identified by Charles Snow (1959). In fact however the problem was already there in medieval times, because the difference between the mystics and the dogma (or doctrine) in the religious knowledge is much similar to that between the dwelling in the subjectively and intuitively grasped meanings common for arts and humanities and the commitment to the external formalized knowledge of natural science.

The distinction between the humanitarian and the scientific-technological pedagogical paradigms is quite common for Russian scholars. For instance Irina Kolesnikova in her recent book “Pedagogical reality in the mirror of inter-paradigm reflection” (1999) divides the space of pedagogical interaction into three dimensions - the transcendental, the objective, and the subjective one and distinguishes accordingly between the three pedagogical paradigms based upon the authority, norms and standards of religion, that of science, and that of humanities. She describes the current moment in the evolution of pedagogy as a second paradigmatic transition - that from the second to the third paradigm. The key process in this transition is the assimilation by pedagogues of the hu-

manitarian way of thinking. What happens now in RE is, from my point of view, just the same. It can be described as the formation of the humanitarian paradigm of RE, and in the last section of the presentation I offer a brief introduction to the concept.

4. Humanitarian paradigm of RE

In England it was realized very soon after the beginning of the radical reform of catechetical approach that there are three different ways to teach religion at school. The famous 'School Council Working Paper 36' (1971) distinguished between dogmatic, antidogmatic and adogmatic approaches. Later on M. Grimmitt offered a much more successful distinction between "learning religion" "learning about religion" and "learning from religion", following partly the way set by US Supreme Court decision (1963) to distinguish between the first and the second. It is the third concept of M. Grimmitt and the earlier concept of adogmatic approach that correspond closely to our concept of humanitarian RE. As a synonym of 'learning from religion' the concepts of *developmental* (Grimmitt 1987) or even *educational* religious education (Cox 1966) were introduced and it means that the core idea of the 'third way' was associated by English scholars with educational grounding of RE presented above. John Hull puts it succinctly by saying that while the first type of RE is controlled usually by religious bodies and the second one is controlled by scientific study of religion, the third kind of RE 'becomes a discipline within educational studies'. According to Hull, this is the kind of RE that has as its principal objective the humanization of the pupil, that is, making a contribution to the pupil's moral and spiritual development' (Hull 2001, p.5). Thus the humanitarian nature of this third kind of RE is determined by the commitment to the ideal of matured and flourishing personality inherent to the liberal idea of education. Unfortunately in the European history of education the struggle for this ideal sometimes appeared (and referring to my local Russian experience keeps on appearing) in the form of the struggle against Church influence and administrative power at school. The idea of developing and humanizing RE is definitely the opposite of that type of 'learning religion' approach that identifies its ultimate goal with the transmission of the ultimate truth and installing the pupil into the system of relations that provide him a better chance for salvation.

But that is not enough for a description. The second opposition – that of the "learning about" and "learning from" approaches – must be taken into consideration. It is important to note that the identification of 'educationally grounded' RE with the third approach, made by N. Smart, M. Grimmitt, J. Hull and other leading theorists of non-confessional RE in England, means that they have found the idea of scientific, neutral and objective study of religion in school inconsistent with principal educational criteria. Working Paper 36 is quite decisive in that, claiming that the objective study of religion leads to its misinterpretation rather than to proper understanding. Thus the concept of intersubjectivity (as distinct from objectivity), the equipment with hermeneutic methods of investigation and the commitment to the standards of humanities such as the focus

on the particular and on the personal, the claim for the contextualization of truth, the principal impossibility of obtaining a complete knowledge and others, become essential for the identification of humanitarian paradigm in the field of RE as well as in the other sectors of school education.

I prefer to use another version of typology of RE, more appropriate to our Russian context. It implies the distinction between teaching and learning religion as *a law*, as *a fact*, and as *a gift*. Since the religious subject taught in Russian schools before revolution was called a ‘God law’ there is no need to explain the first concept to Russian educators. The concept of teaching religion as a fact is now widely used and clearly refers to the distancing and objective presentation of religious data for studying them on the same premises as the other historical facts. The third concept, coined in English context by John Hull, is new for Russia and causes questions. As in English, ‘a gift’ in Russian means both the inborn talent and something that I can get from outside I find this ambiguity of the term quite helpful, for it adequately portrays the dual subjective-objective character of religious phenomena as they appear to our consciousness. It highlights the main idea and goal of humanizing RE, that is to be a contribution to personal development. But it remains tacit about the form of teacher-pupil-and-subject relation, leaving open the question of how and when the personal meeting of a pupil with his religion should take place.

The idea of teaching religion as a gift as well as the idea of developmental RE is fully consistent with the Christian idea of education and that of the Church-related school. That is why in the presented scheme the locations of the humanitarian paradigm of RE and ‘religion-as-a-gift’ approach are not identical. While the former is considered to be tightly connected with the non-confessional forms of RE, the latter is supposed to be relevant to the confessional context too. Of course the transition to this paradigm from the scholastic one assumes some rearrangements of educational interaction and deep re-conceptualizing such key pedagogical categories as the aim of schooling, the role of the teacher, the personal freedom of belief, and others. But the changes required for entering the new paradigm need not to be done at the expense of Christian commitment. For example, it is often difficult for a Christian teacher of religion to consider his/her activity as distinct from evangelization. But the Gospel gives us in the parable of a Sower a helpful image for that distinction. What other shoot could that good soil be growing, if not a heart and mind cultivated by education? So why should a teacher of RE have ambitions to be a sower of the Word of God if he has got another very difficult and very crucial role – that of a ploughman? This kind of vision and experience can give a teacher a better understanding of what is the essential difference between school and parish life and why Paul distinguished between the gifts of an apostle and a teacher. And that would be also a progress in our understanding of Christian mission and the diversity of Church presence and witness to this world. The new approaches to RE can and should be tested and justified not only on educational but also on theological ground. And that is one of the urgent tasks for Christian mission.

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