

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Role of Christian Values in Contemporary Bulgarian Society and Education

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to reveal the importance of Christian values in contemporary Bulgarian society and education. It analyses the issues of the validity of Christian moral laws and the need for highly moral people involved in education, politics and the administration of justice today. Despite the age-old traditions of the Bulgarian people, preserving a sound moral foundation in educating young people has become increasingly difficult. This is due to the loss of the moral key link between the intellectual development of the young generation and the spiritual strengthening of its value system. In a sense, we are faced with the inevitable test: will we be able to remain faithful to our high ideals arising from our knowledge of the spiritual world and our living perception of it.

**Key words:** Christian Values, Education, Morality, Faith, Role, Society.

## 1. Background

Looking at the past through the eyes of the present is always useful. Even in ancient times, the wise teachings of Buddha, Confucius, and Socrates preached moral and ethical principles that are valid for any society – good will, faith, honesty, ethics, compassion, and humanity. Nowadays, virtues are contained in Christian teaching, but practically they seem to have been forgotten or have disappeared.

Basic Christian values are acquired within the family unit, but it is no longer sufficient and cannot cope with the world around us. Young people's role models are the aggressive, vulgar, and morally unscrupulous personalities whose presence on screens and billboards is almost daily [1].

Against the background of these post-modern times, the Bulgarian contemporary society is faced with many issues; yet, undoubtedly, the spiritual and moral education of children and young people is of most essential ones. In our society, Christian values are in deficit because society is secularised. In the past

20 years, there has been a lot of talk about European values, especially in the context of an increasingly fast-moving global society.

Bulgaria, as a country that is aware of itself as part of Europe, is also experiencing the impact of imposing new models of behaviour and the lack of a clear position on a dominant value system. Despite the age-old traditions of the Bulgarian people and culture, preserving and protecting a sound moral basis in the education of young people is increasingly difficult.

This is partly due to the loss of the moral key link between the intellectual development of the young generation and the spiritual strengthening of its value system. Faith and tradition are the main pillars of the spirit of a people, of a nation. This should not be neglected when formulating and defining the state policy of education and instruction.

The great Bulgarian poet and writer Ivan Vazov also appealed for this. 'Let us not forget that in the past the churches built the schools and awakened, guided and guarded the national heritage.' This 'is not archaic.

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It is the fruit of a high culture, the work of a clear consciousness on the aims and tasks of man in their life as a person and citizen.' As Christians, we should strive to live according to the vision, standards and core values of the Christian Church, but in practice we live in a world of chaos, moral decay, and trampled moral and ethical principles. We need religious education in Bulgarian schools.

The Church should not be just a unit, but should express its opinion on important social matters and have a leading role in people's lives. It is necessary to speak about the profound issues of faith to the public. Christian values should become part of civil society. The Church should not only be in the sphere of worship, but should engage in public activity in order to reach more people.

If the moral and ethical principles of Christian doctrine become the basis of civil society, we will have virtuous individuals – with respect, loyalty, honesty, and duty to the national cultural and historical heritage. The aim of spiritual and moral education at school is the formation and development of the moral qualities of the child's personality in the context of Christian spirituality and its integration into the world. The design and implementation of a programme to build, preserve and promote awareness of Christian values among children and pupils should have several important objectives:

1. Inclusion in the moral and spiritual values of Christian culture [2].
2. Studying the history, the culture, the natural and ecological uniqueness of the native land.
3. Striving for the revival of traditions in family upbringing.

### **The Achievement of these Objectives is Feasible Through the Complex Solution of Specific Tasks**

- educating respect for the moral norms of Christian morality. Teaching children to distinguish between good and evil and be able to do good [3]. The basic principle is to build life on the foundation of the requirements of Christian perfection (free recognition of the rule 'Depart from evil, and do good')
- forming empathy for spiritual and cultural heritage
- orienting the family in the spiritual and moral education of children (introducing parents to the basics of Christian pedagogy and psychology, forming ideas about the model and values of the traditional family structure)

- forming a sense of one's own dignity as a representative of one's nation and a tolerant attitude towards other nationalities and religions.

### **Different Forms of Working With Children Can Be Applied**

- regulated and non-regulated pedagogical situations, respectively, educational, extracurricular and out-of-class activities;
- games with moral and combined spiritual and moral content;
- multimedia presentations, video films, audio recordings and technical means of training;
- talks by theologians and ministers;
- applied creativity;
- holding joint celebrations and events with adults and children;
- excursions, targeted walks, visits to an Orthodox church.

The specific purposes of spiritual and moral education are the following ones: celebration of religious holidays in kindergarten, school and family, pre-holiday meetings, visits to museums, organizing a 'Holiday Corner' and exhibitions of artists, cognitive talks, creative productive and play activities, excursions to churches, etc. The family plays a leading role in the development of the child's personality [4].

Surveys of parents' attitudes towards the implementation of religious and moral education show that most of them would like their children to be familiar with traditions and religion and to grow up with clear ideas about moral norms and morality. The fruitfulness of the educational process is directly related to the coherence between the goals and pedagogical efforts of the family and educators. That is why, the work on the formation of Christian values is built on the basis of involving adults and children in an accessible understanding of the main traditional spiritual values in the context of Bulgarian national identity [5].

The focus on working with the family can be expressed in a variety of forms of work with parents: parents' meetings on spiritual and moral topics; open pedagogical situations or lessons presenting the process of upbringing and education; conducting joint learning activities (seminars); information stands for parents, individual folders with materials for children to take home, exhibitions of children's works, didactic games, literature; excursions; home visits; celebrating

holidays with parents; joint attendance of religious services and trips to monasteries, etc. One still under-explored area of our public life and national cultural tradition is the role of the Christian faith and the Church as bearers of spiritual values and factors for the formation of a democratic political culture and the stabilization of civil society.

This topic is gradually becoming the subject of serious new historical and other interdisciplinary researches, which also implies a new deeper study and presentation of the specific religious, theological and philosophical presuppositions stemming from the spiritual tradition of Orthodoxy and other Christian communities in Europe and Bulgaria, which have a determining significance for Christian support of the civic values of democracy, human rights, freedom of conscience and humanism.

The following few sentences from an anonymous author reveal the real need for the revival of true Christian values and virtues for the good of our whole society. He addresses himself like this: "Dear teacher! I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness:

Gas chambers built by learned engineers.

Children poisoned by educated physicians.

Infants killed by trained nurses.

Graduates of top institutes became top civil servants without any morals"...

At the end of his story, he begs: "My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human." [6]

The modern school finds itself in the spotlight, as the times we live in demand a multitude of competences from the adolescent generation. Meanwhile, the educational function of the school seems to remain in the background. There is a disconnect between the emotional and professional preparation of many students. The knowledge base that they have acquired in the course of their studies proves insufficient for their full development.

To reach the development of their full potential, individuals need self-awareness and when it is missing, it is replaced by spiritual deficiency. Quality development can only happen in an environment that nurtures principles and ideals which form individuals of worthy character, people who value others around

them [7]. In this aspect, the school should not only be a building for giving certain knowledge, but a source of virtue and piety. Christian education forms value orientations and helps to prevent the process of demoralization among the adolescent Bulgarian society.

## 2. Conclusion

Having said the above, we may come to the conclusion that the Christian moral values are freedom of conscience, human rights and justice. They form a profound spiritual culture of freedom and the democratic rule of law, which is at the heart of the struggle of Christians [8].

This spiritual tradition of Christianity is also the basis of the European political tradition of democracy. Only in this way can we oppose the inhuman system of political oppression that the political movements of National Socialism and Totalitarian Communism have built.

One of the most famous educators in human history, Jan Amos Comenius, called the school 'a workshop for humanity'. The comparison is not at all accidental, because it contains the basic idea of education, namely the building of the unique human personality with its creative pursuits and successes, which contribute to the development of society.

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