

Book Reviews

Emanuel Tăvală, *Der Religionsunterricht im Kontext von Säkularisierung – Der Fall Rumänien*, Felicitas, Stockholm, 2015, 450 p.

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After almost two years of public debates regarding the utility and the legality of religious education in the public education system in Romania, at the beginning of last year Dr. Emanuel Tăvală, assistant professor at the Faculty of Law of “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu published a daring investigation, entitled *Religious Education in the Context of Secularization – The Case of Romania*.

As the author points out in the *Preface*, this volume was prepared to respond to the initiative of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church that proclaimed the year 2016 as “the year of the Religious Education of the Christian Orthodox youth”.

Without insisting on the introductory elements, the author tackles directly the problem set forth in the title religious education, which is considered on three levels, each of them forming up a separate chapter – the first three of this bold analysis: 1. *The History of Christian Religious Education*; 2. *Church, State and Society* respectively 3. *The Legal Situation of Religious Education today*. Each time three models from three countries are presented: Switzerland (especially the German Cantons: Bern, Zurich and Luzern), Germany (throughout its history from the 19th and 20th centuries) and, of course, Romania. In each case, the author insists on pointing out elements that have permeated specific directions according to the political regime and the socio-cultural background of these countries, with a constant emphasis on the situation in Romania.

Thus, the legal aspects involved in religious education in the public education systems of the European Union are developed, and the author points out that the religious element is perhaps the most sensitive for each state and each community. Considered as a social construct and an institutional reality, religion has played a crucial role in shaping the European society. That is why religious education in the public education system is a complicated problem, the complexity of which is also due to the public character

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of the schools. Religious education is present in the public education system of several European countries, including most of the EU member states. Their legal systems provide and respect the separation between Church and State, and that is why the principle of state neutrality is a guarantee that there is no contradiction between the secular state and religious education in public schools.

The investigation aims to clarify the distinction between the obligations that European countries have accepted in the field of international law, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the domestic legislation that each country has adopted. The common point is the right to education, stipulated by the Declaration of Human Rights, and guaranteed by constitution, at least at the theoretical level, by each state, interested in public education to help integrate its citizens, unifying the pluralistic and even antagonistic society. But at the same time, the purpose of education is the personal development of the young generation, encouraging the discovery of the individual's personal skills, and this process also involves, in addition to certain specific knowledge and technical skills, a form of integration of the person into a given culture. And this cannot be accomplished by abstaining from religion.

The novel contribution of this investigation is the highlighting of the responsibility that the state assumes to form the personality of the youth, responsibility which implies and does not exclude the religious aspect of their inner universe. Following this logic, the complete rejection of religion, by marginalizing or ignoring it as a discipline for the development and formation of future citizens, would produce discrimination, which is contrary to the state's neutrality. Moreover, the rejection of religion would ultimately lead to the failure to fully and comprehensively educate the youth. The argument is as worthy of consideration, even more so as it is presented rationally and logically, contrasting with the almost exclusively emotional debate regarding religion in schools, as it has during the last years in Romania.

Starting from these premises, the author states that it is the duty of the state to ensure the possibility of religious education in public schools, leaving the issue of the content of this education to the most important Churches, which must decide on the issues to be addressed, and in the meantime the state guarantees that no one is forced to follow those classes by force.

Of course, the great challenge is the discipline's curricula, the methods, the inadequate selection of the educational material corresponding to the young people's age and their power of understanding. Without touching these thorny issues, the author also analyses, from the legal point of view, in the last chapter entitled *Theological Foundations for Religious Education in State Schools and Forms of Application*, the basic elements of religious educa-

tion with confessional particularities, particularly comparing the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Evangelical Churches. The spiritual dimension of Human Rights and the impact of the Gospel on society are emphasized, but these themes are regarded more as desideratum than realities in the field.

Focused on the theoretical side of the issue of religious education, the book written by Emanuel Tăvală is an exemplary guide to understanding the fragile balance between education as a fundamental right and the religious-moral formation as a civic responsibility. But although the topic is of interest and the balanced treatment of these themes recommends the book as a starting point in a rational dialogue with the representatives of civil society, the publication only in German limits its impact, so I hope that soon this volume will be available in Romanian as soon as possible.