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## Gestalt approach of Albert Höfer in religion classes during the first four years of primary education

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## **Gestalt Approach of Albert Höfer in Religion Classes during the First Four Years of Primary Education**

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### **Introduction**

After many years of being part of an integrated Czechoslovakian system, Slovakia has been trying to create their common profile in teaching Religion since 1989. There is an obvious process of searching for adequate didactic methods that would motivate pupils and improve the teaching efficiency of the subject taught in primary schools during the first four years. I see the process as a space for reflection due to the constantly changing object of teaching – which is the pupil – influenced by various new factors (such as mass media, images etc.) In this context I find it very interesting to take a closer look at the Gestalt Approach used by Austrian teachers of Religion. The Gestalt Approach is not yet well-known in Slovakia. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it is rather more often used within the fields of psychology and therapy. I learned more about this approach in 2001–2003 during my three-year course in Graz, Austria, which was lead by researchers from the Institute of Gestalt Education and Therapy and organized by the Methodical Centre in Bratislava, Slovakia. The course was lead by Prof. Albert Höfer and Dr. Katarina Steiner. In that time I became an internal doctoral student at the Faculty of Education of the Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovakia, and I started to study the Gestalt Approach more closely. In September 2003 I started my one-year international study programme at the Academy of Religious Education in Graz-Seckau, Austria. This programme aimed to acquire a detailed knowledge of the education system and its teaching methodology and instruments.

The Austrian system of educating teachers of Religion is different from the Slovak one: the teachers of Religion for primary schools study at the Academies of Religious Education, but the teachers for secondary schools (both academic and vocational) study at the Universities (Faculty of Theology). During my first months at the Academy I noticed that the Gestalt Approach was considered to be fundamental, and not an alternative, for teaching Religion during the first four years of primary education (further referred to as 1–4). A whole set of pupil's books for Religion 1–4 is based on this approach.

When speaking about the Gestalt Approach, we should not forget to mention Prof. Albert Höfer who has applied the Gestalt Approach in religious education in America and Germany. He is a 76-year-old diocesan priest, who used to teach catechetics and homiletics at the Faculty of Theology. More than 27 years ago he completely lost his eye-sight and that brought him closer to the Gestalt Therapy. He used to be very active in his scientific field and the loss of sight lead caused him to lapse into depression. His faith in God and the Gestalt Therapy helped him to accept his fate. He realized that the Gestalt Therapy could be helpful even for his healthy students and teachers of Religion, too. Being blind he has written many books and is still active in this field. He founded the Academy for Teachers of Religion in the Graz-Seckau Diocese and became its director for many years. He elaborated the base documents for the curriculum of Religion 1–4 and his students prepared textbooks and methodical handbooks for each year of the first four years of primary schools.

Between 2001–2003, Prof. Höfer lead a course of Gestalt Education and Assistance together with Dr. Katarina Steiner for approximately 40 teachers of Religion in Slovakia. The course participants had a chance to learn about the various methods of Gestalt Approach and be formed by them as well.

The Gestalt Education Institute lead by Prof. Höfer, contains four stages of studying the Gestalt Approach. Each stage takes about two to three years. This approach works with one's heart and that is very enriching. Students search for answers to questions which rouse one's fantasy and self-identification. The Gestalt Approach uses both picture and

text in a unique way. Its goal is to transmit a lesson. Pupils become co-authors. The pupil has to accept the object of a lesson with all their senses: hands, heart, mind... in order to accept the lesson itself. The approach goes from written text to a free re-telling; from heard text to the inner picture full of phantasy; from the inner picture to a personal drawing; from picture perception to personal identification with the picture; from biblical discussion to an educational game; from the message of peace to eliminating aggression; from the outer listening of the topic to the inner realisation of its fundamentals. Prof. Höfer is a master of working with phantasy, especially with the phantasy of pupils or course participants. In various biblical texts that are followed by picturing, he can reveal many psychological aspects which update the biblical concepts to the man of our times. The Gestalt Approach can be used in any kind of education because it uses the experimental method to deepen knowledge and what's more, it employs one's heart and helps the man to gain new information.

### 1. Interpretation of the term „Gestalt“

The term *Gestalt* is the central term of the disciplines Gestalt psychology, Gestalt therapy and Gestalt pedagogy. It originates from German and it means the “shape, form, figure, structure, configuration” (Hartl, Hartlová, 2000, p.179). Yet in 1886 the physicist Ernst Macht used the term *Gestalt* in relation to the perception of space and form. Christian von Ehrenfels in his theory about shapes has adopted the idea of Macht who explains how to perceive and to conceive a spatial shape. “For example, when we are looking at a tree, we do not perceive only his single parts: the trunk, the tree-top, the branches, but we also see one unit, one gestalt – one image, shape.” (Hufnagl, 2003, p. 16). Furthermore, a man is not only a sum, a connection of the different parts of a body, but he is an individual who has the certain image, figure, shape. He is a personality. The term “Gestalt includes the holistic notion of the whole, the wholeness. The whole is more than the sum of its parts” (Cebrat, 2003, p. 2). This

definition is possible to understand in connection with an example about flowers. When a man is watching single flowers, he can see a violet bell-flower, he can smell its scent. He can see a yellow dandelion, red field poppies, etc. If he perceives all these flowers jointly in a meadow, then what is important for him is the casting of colours of single flowers, scents, the influence of the weather, those sounds which are resounding at that moment on a meadow. From the coloured scale of flowers arise different new colours, or shades, scents, that fall under the influence of other determinants – the weather, the geographical zone – rouse the certain feelings, thoughts, and give the certain atmosphere to the whole. The whole which rises from all of this is then more than just the sum of its individual parts. It means that the overall atmosphere of a meadow is much more than its individual components; in this case single flowers, soil, and meteorological situation, etc.

The term Gestalt emerges in several disciplines of science. In Sociology the interpretation of the term Gestalt relates to its above mentioned explanation. It denotes “the integrated dynamic of the whole which is not possible to analyse and it is impossible to understand it by fragmentation, because it is always more than a summation of parts, and so it is not derivable from assembling of the qualities of its components” (Geist, 1992, p. 100). We say here about the tendency to unity, complexity, about over-summation, about the organised whole, the parts of which are in a certain way interdependent; they have certain signs, by which they are connected to the whole. The solidity of the shape – gestalt – is dependent on the level of the mutual dependence of the parts. The more the shape is solid, the greater the dependence of each of its parts on all the others, and the more this dependence influences its parts. “By the name Gestalt we understand such shapes – thoughts, spatial formations that have specific attributes as the wholes, and so we can justly comprehend them as separate entities.” (Geist, 1992, p. 100).

As Christian von Ehrenfels was the first to use this notion, he became the pivotal character of Gestalt psychology – complex, shape psychology. “This term has been used for the denomination of the approach that Max Wertheimer and his colleagues Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Köhler

maintained." (Atkinson, 2003, p. 8). Gestalt is understood here as the sample, figure, model, peculiar method, sort, namely as the whole, not the preferred single elements. The term "whole" then becomes "the central term of the complex, shape psychology. It is underlined that organic, psychological, social effects and processes are of a complex character. The complex approach in psychology is possible to regard as an anti-pole of mechanic and elementaristic comprehension of a cause and an impact." (Hartl, Hartlová, 2000, p. 8). Other terms are often related to the term Gestalt: figure, character, image, background, which Gestalt psychology often uses. It also has something to say about the fact that every figure corresponds with a different background. Gestalt theory sets the character to the forefront following the experiences, regarding the background, which altogether creates gestalt – image, shape.

The term Gestalt is active even nowadays, mainly thanks to Gestalt therapy, the establisher of which was Fritz Perls. He has expressed "that the nature is entirely organised and we have to understand the function of one part in the complex structure. Gestalt, the wholeness is expressed in the statement that the part is in a mutual relation to the whole, and the whole has much to do with the part." (Klaushofer, 1989, p. 18). Gestalt – the shape – arises mainly on the basis of configuration (composition, linkage) of individual parts. Often the shape does not change, although its details do. An example with a melody is most frequently stated: "A melody played by different instruments, in different keys, though remains always the same. We say that it is transposed." (Kern, 1999, p. 44). In order to improve our comprehension of the term it is interesting to have a look also at the connection with a verb having the same stem. In German language a word "Die Gestaltung" means "figuration, formation" (Seebauer, Maňák, 1999, p. 57), which in the area of application to the religious education A. Höfer has expressed: "The term Gestalt has in European heritage far reaching roots which give Gestalt pedagogy basic impulses. Even the very collocation – something gains a form – shows that there a realisation of matters." (Höfer, 2004, p. 8). In religious education, there exists the aim of Gestalt pedagogy in relation with the genesis of the very notion to achieve, that the belief of pupils would "gain the

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certain form, to give the form to their belief, what will become evident in their creative co-operation" (Höfer, 2004, p. 8).

## 2. Criteria for Gestalt pedagogical teaching

Criteria for Gestalt pedagogical teaching appears from the described principles of Gestalt pedagogy. According to Burow, Quitmenn and Rube-nau from 1987 there exist the following criteria:

1. To join the contents of teaching with a personal meaning.
2. To give consideration in a school-teaching to the individual biography of each pupil, his personal life history.
3. To give consideration to living conditions of an ordinary school day.
4. To realise the principle here and now within the frame of a school class.
5. To affect all senses during a school-teaching. Heed to the importance of action of more senses, because there are pupils who perceive more by sight, whereas others perceive more by hearing etc.
6. To take advantage of the constant motion and dynamics of the atmosphere, which is formed through a school-teaching process, and which increases in a class, in the school yard, in a gym, etc.
7. To try continually to create a proximate, not artificial communication.
8. To drill active listening with pupils.
9. To perceive in a school-teaching process also non-verbal communication.
10. To establish positive and helpful relations between teachers and pupils, but also between pupils mutually.
11. To experiment with decisions.
12. To make use of a fantasy.

13. To make use of arts, music, role-playing, literature, dance, etc., and therefore to help the development of a pupil's personality, to take advantage of an expression of personal dispositions of each pupil.
14. To endeavour to achieve, that pupils would produce most of their own study materials. Not to let them passively accept things from their teacher.
15. To utilise games and exercises. (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987).

To these basic criteria which were formed by the founders of Gestalt pedagogy, there are two more stated in the contemporary literature:

16. Do not do anything for a pupil that he can do himself.
17. "Experience-orientated, diverse and flexible teaching is very important. Operational forms should be changed during the course of a lesson, e.g. writing, painting, playing, representation, circle games, pair work, group work, role-play, stage play, scene setting, jumping, singing, etc." (Pohlhammer, 1999, p. 22).

Gestalt-pedagogic teaching is not characterized only according to used methods and exercises, but mainly according to the fact that it:

- teaches students to initiate and interrupt contacts between people (Neuhold, 2008, p. 6–9),
- teaches students to intentionally manage their relationships with others (Müller, 2010, p. 16–18),
- cultivates their correct assessment of situations, phenomena and people,
- teaches students to go through and overcome conflicts and make decisions in conflict situations,
- teaches students the correct self-expression and self-reflexion not only verbally but also mentally,
- evokes a self-reflexion processes (Zelina, 2000).



### 3. Methods of Gestalt pedagogy

In Gestalt pedagogy there are these preferred methods: identification/projection, fantasy/imagination exercises, exercises for self-observation and observation of surroundings, work with a body and motion, games with assigned roles (role-plays), simulation, utilizing of creative means, exercises for communication in a group and the increasing of self-confidence.

#### Identification

One of the most common methods is identification, which occurs in connection with an activity of a man. The following forms of identification are quite common: with a text, a plant, a thing at which a man imposes himself to them with his feelings, perception, etc. The exercises, which pupils perform, are often those in which they "become" something else. For example: a flower, a stone. E.g. "I am a tree, I have a big thick trunk, and many green leaves. I am about 200 years-old and I have gone through a lot... A pupil describes what kind of a tree he is, what trees are around him, what this tree is experiencing. A teacher asks him questions." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 34). While working with a picture, a very strong identification occurs with characters, and an action in the picture. "Describe what you can see. How are you feeling at this? What does it evoke in you? What would you like to do?" (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 34). In the same way, for example, conflicts and tensions in a class, including the non-acceptance of a pupil by the group, can be solved very well through identification exercises. A teacher can use a method of a dialogue of two chairs, when he is seated on one of them and speaks on behalf of it, e.g. like a pupil unaccepted by a collective, and when he is seated on another one, he speaks on behalf of a class. A dialogue happens there. Pupils watch a situation and gradually understand what a teacher wanted to show. By the fact that there rose the identification of chairs with people and their problems, the aim of education and the action of a teacher was accepted willingly, without a pressure. "Identifica-

tion emerges from an assumption, that each of the factual contents, each piece of information, each problem has a sentiment charge, everything has a personal sense. The affective charge of identification as a method, increases a personal sense and the efficiency of memory, by what it offers multifarious options of the utilization." (Bürman Fosterová, Kienzlová, 2001, p. 30).

### **Exercises with a fantasy**

Work through fantasy has in Gestalt pedagogy a very important role. "Imagination starts by a preliminary relaxation of pupils. A released, stress-less situation contributes to the fact, that the educational potential is better utilised, and it supports optimal teaching." (Müller, 1998, p. 104).

Demonstrative pictures are able to activate potentialities which are hidden in the personality of pupils. While working with a fantasy it is very important to accommodate a room for the use of this method. Blankets and carpets are very often used to be able to lie down and create the best position for releasing of imagination. Moreover, the posture of a body of pupils, such as closed eyes, certainty and tranquillity of pupils, breathing, peace and relaxation, good comprehensibility of the teacher's commentary, from whose words emanates a visualization, a fantasy of pupils is important. Fantasy exercises make teaching effective; they affect relaxing, increase the ability to concentrate, improve the efficiency of memory, relieve pupils of physical and mental tension. They offer the energy for another activity. (Bürman, Fosterová, Kienzlová, 2001, p. 31).

For an exercise using fantasy, it is possible to use a narration of a story. A teacher retells a certain story and pupils visualize it having their eyes closed. For example: "Today we are at the end of our stay in a school in the country. Close your eyes..., breathe calmly and regularly... Now you are returning back in your fantasy to the day we arrived here. Bring yourself over, how were you feeling when you arrived here... What was your first night like...? What was your impression when you arrived here...?" (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 41). Work with fantasy is particularly necessary, because in school-teaching there is always the reason in the forefront in the development of man, rational thinking,

cognitive side of a personality, and emotions and the spirit remains in the background. "The idea that we do not have all our wealth in knowledge, but also the wisdom and a deep feeling of responsibility is important in our internal world, is very fascinating. Even nowadays a meditation is very important, and a reflection on ourselves." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 40). Images emerging while working with a fantasy are further expressed in different versions. Pupils are talking about them in pairs, groups, paint them, express them by their own body.

### **Self-perception and perception of others**

The structure of perception of each man is always dependent on his personal, individual life story. Self-perception, perception of the others, self-reflection, and reflection on the others, has unfolded from all of this. For the development of self-perception and the perception of the others, feedback as a central method is needed. Gestalt pedagogy uses direct and indirect feedback mainly in a class, where it is required to perceive the social behaviour of individual pupils. It is not only important for pupils to get the information from a teacher – positive feedback on their performances and behaviour, but also to teach them how to express it to other individuals." Feedback represents control in the social sphere. Control does not mean that I must implicitly operate on the basis of the feedback, but I have the possibility to decide which consequences that result from it I want to use for myself and my personal development" (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 48).

### ***Direct feedback***

For example: "A person conceals something hidden in himself, e.g. an anger, which he expresses only to the certain person. Then, there are two people present in the process of communication, and feedback should help the quality of their relationship to gain new, richer dimensions." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 49). At the level of direct feedback, a person who perceives this anger, expresses his feelings verbally directly to the person concerned. At the direct feedback there are two people involved in communication, and they decide which direction it will set out.

### **Indirect feedback**

It often comes to feedback which is not interpreted directly. For example: I, as a teacher, announce something, and a listener – a pupil, starts to rock on a chair, or some pupils start to whisper something mutually. A pupil's rocking motion on a chair represents his indirect feedback, by which he expresses to me, as a teacher, for example, his lassitude about a topic, disagreement with my expression, etc. "Feedback is expressed in a direct verbal form, but the experiencing of the one who expresses it, can be also expressed indirectly on his face (irony, sarcasm, etc.)." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 49). Feedback should not only succeed to something that has failed, but it should succeed also to positive acts and performances. It must be specific and it must be clear to a pupil what a teacher wants to announce to him: perception, presumptions, feelings. It must be described in relation with a particular behaviour. "The one to whom feedback is addressed should have an obligation to listen first, without commentary, only after that it is suitable to answer." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 50).

### **Work with a body**

"In the frame of Gestalt pedagogy there are two essences which we have regard for in teaching: the awareness of a body, and the involvement of a physical dimension to professional teaching." (Burow, Quitmann, Rubeau, 1987, p. 56). Teaching constantly draws attention to the fact that a body of a pupil presents a very important element of himself. Lessons are interwoven with short activities, which activate pupils to a movement. There are plenty of methods that a teacher uses during lessons. Pupils often work in pairs, groups, dance to music, move by hands, etc. These kinetic short activities serve the purpose of a quick rest of pupils during cognitive work, and a change of activity, which is very necessary for young pupils, as their ability to concentrate lasts only 8–12 minutes. By a short exercise they reconcentrate and can continue to engage in the further teaching process. Gestalt pedagogy, as the integrative teaching, provides a great space for physical activities.

#### 4. Four elements of Gestalt-education Bible activities

Gestalt education as such is widely used in Europe but fairly new as far as Bible activities are concerned. The subject of Gestalt-educational Bible activities is the Word of God – Kerygma which is introduced in a biblical context but can be transformed from an old event of salvation to the present listener. In other words, kerygma has to “change its form”. The important milestones of this transformation are the cornerstones of didactics in the methodical process of Bible teaching. They are included in the Gestalt education. The four elements can be illustrated as four parts of a large window divided by a cross:

1. *Meditating the text* is the starting point and the target of Bible activities even in cases when the text is “well-known” to the pupil or participant.
2. *Observing the picture* means almost the first pupil’s contact with the biblical message in order to “encounter a text transformed into an artistic dimension which is not meant for aesthetic perception but for being a base stone for a complex conjunction process between the story and the picture. The goal of all work is to incorporate the content personally and to absorb it.” (Höfer, 1997, p. 21).
3. *Retelling the biblical text* is the bridge from the text to the picture. It can be full of colourful details or rather historical and factual (the teacher points out to three people walking on the road). It is of an advantage if the teacher uses the power of creative speech.
4. *Creative activities* are the core part of each Gestalt education. “According to the topic and material, a creative process is started which combines the unawareness of a pupil and the richness of a religious symbol into a certain form and thus visualises both dimensions at once. In other words, the “fruitful moment” is used here, as known already in the old pedagogy and methodology,

according to which the pupil's interest can be raised by special assignments (observing, creative changes, community activities etc.)." (Höfer, 1997, p. 28). From the theological point of view, the pupil reaches out for the part of the biblical message which strikes them the most. In the creative activities the pupil can see in their personal response to what God wants to tell them at the moment.

The core pillars of Gestalt are the three laws or basic principles of the Gestalt education.

#### ***First Gestalt principle***

The first Gestalt law: "The reality is more than just a sum of its parts" is significant especially for determining the curriculum, choosing the topic and didactics. There is no way one can simply take a list of theological terms and divide them into the years and lessons of religious education. What is the main subject of Religion? It is the living person of Jesus Christ who can be divided into neither a set of theological terms nor events of his life and teaching. On the contrary: "if a pupil begins to see Jesus from a different perspective through understanding a certain event of His life, they will understand more of the message than any theological tract could bring." (Höfer, 1997, p. 16). The inexhaustible mystery of God became flesh; that is to say, something concrete, substantial and inviting to meet. Hence, the Gestalt Approach is based on the principle „Pars pro toto," i.e. the unity is offered a short extract. Pupils learn about Jesus through various stories which they can experience, create and become part of.

#### ***Second Gestalt principle***

The second Gestalt law is the principle of characters' background – according to which „things can be visible, heard and perceived only if they are differentiated from their background." (Höfer, 1997, p. 16) For instance a tree cannot be seen in a dark night until it is enlightened by the morning dawn. A voice or a melody cannot be heard in the roar of a jet

plane. These obvious laws of the perceptive psychology are very effective when used in education. Teachers can better understand their pupils if they know their background, i.e. their life-stories, religious experience and/or their roles in the class. Similarly, teachers have their backgrounds, too. The life background is partially conscious and called back in memories but mostly subconscious. Gestalt education has borrowed a lot from Gestalt therapy which aims to understand man on the basis of their subconscious background. Lessons gain new dimensions if the subconscious background is implied.

### ***Third Gestalt principle***

The third Gestalt law is based on the principle: "here and now". Each reality becomes real only in the presence and can be realised in coexistence on the same place." Its future value can be judged according to the degree to which it can be involved in the presence." (Höfer, 1997, p. 17). It is remarkable that adults remember their classes of Religion by speaking about their teacher first, then remembering the things they did, and only then they remember the substance of the classes. The atmosphere of the tutorial process has a crucial influence on the content of the education itself. The principle of presence fulfils itself most deeply in its theological sense. Thomas Aquinas said that the faith of the faithful did not refer to spoken words but to the matters in their background; that is to say, to God alone. In any aspect, the presence of God gives the religious classes the principle "here and now." God's personal presence is delivered through parables, symbols, metaphors, and myths and thus reminds us of the ways of how to understand it at all.

## **5. Example of Gestalt education**

### *(Jacob's Way of Conversion)*

The following is an example of Gestalt education (picture activities): there is the story of Jacob. Working with a picture is a very common method of Gestalt education. For each biblical story, teachers use a set of

9 pictures which make one unit. The pictures are painted by Anna Seifert, a painter from Austria. Pupils listen to a biblical text and look at the picture. Each picture can be used individually to retell the story and to absorb it in a very personal way. The integrative biblical education combines the message of the picture with the images that the pupils can see. Picture activities can even turn to work with dreams or fantasy. Such activities can be stimulated by twelve incentives listed below, which can help the pupils to move from the outside to the inside. "The order of incentives may be changed according to the situation."



**Picture no. 1:**

*Jacob's Way of Conversion*  
(Anna Seifert)

1. What do you see? (picture description)
2. What in particular comes to your mind? (important detail)
3. What do you especially like and dislike? (assessment)
4. Which person is addressing you? (accepting a relationship)
5. If the person could speak, what would he/she have to tell about their life? (creativity)
6. If you were this person, what would you tell us? (speak in the first person) (identification)



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7. Would you like to talk to this person? (contact acceptance)
  8. What would you call the picture? Give it a title. (topic identification)
  9. Close your eyes: how do you see the picture in your heart? (fantasy activity)
  10. If you could paint or take pictures, what would you change in this picture? (critical attitude)
  11. Write a story based on this picture (Once upon a time ...). (transformation)
  12. What does the picture say to a modern man? (modernization)" (Höfer, 1997, p. 28)

These forms of picture perception are based on the premise that through the teacher's narration and their own observation, the pupils have already established their own intense relationship to the picture. The pictures should help them realize things which emerge from a semi-conscious relationship to the picture. Everyone perceives the picture through their own eyes. The teacher retells the biblical story of Jacob with the aid of picture activities Prof. Albert Höfer who applied gestalt education in the religious education, found parallels of this story to the problems we encounter today, such as sibling rivalry; the pathological addiction of the mother to the youngest son; the power of love; and last but not least the fear of parents who do not want to let their children go. His way of connecting facts and contexts is really unique and skilful.

Speaking of these terms, Prof. Hans Neuhold, follower of the model of Prof. Albert Höfer, who has been involved in Gestalt-pedagogy in Religious education at the Academy for teachers of Religion in Graz, Austria, for years, has used a very pertinent expression: "Gestalt-pedagogy plays a very important role in my work. On the one hand, through my work as a teacher of Religion; on the other hand, through increasing the role of the school in society, where higher educative demands are being shifted from family to school. Thanks to Gestalt-pedagogy, the child is becoming a centre of interest." (Neuhold, 2003, p. 11) Gestalt-pedagogy, "does not stop at the rigid contents of education, but the development

of a student continues through the individuality and imagination of a child." (Hufnagl, 2003, p. 17). A student is viewed as a complex learning being, consisting of body, spirit and soul. There is a very nice description of Gestalt-pedagogy as an "effort to better understanding and the pedagogic improvement of things gained especially through Gestalt-therapy experiences." (Cebzat, 2003, p. 2). It is a pedagogy that is oriented towards a person. The teacher, though, retains his important role, becoming some kind of guardian or vigilant guide.

### **Conclusion**

The Gestalt-pedagogy of Albert Höfer enriches pedagogic practice with a humanistic approach towards a student in context with the kerygma. It provides many creative possibilities for lesson structuring and the conveying the educative content; it also facilitates easier coping with the educative content; and it has a complex view on the development of a student.

Gestalt-pedagogy of Albert Höfer also brings new points in the formation of teachers, since Gestalt-pedagogy and spiritual formation is one of the facultative subjects which students of 'Teacher of first grade for primary school' can choose at the Pedagogic faculty of the Catholic University in Ruzomberok. The Gestalt-pedagogy of Albert Höfer introduces perspectives towards perception of Religious education more from a humanistic-creative view. In Slovakia it thus offers assistance and an alternative, since, as Prof. Höfer says: "When a student, based on a single situation from Jesus' life, starts to perceive the person of Jesus and his mission from a new point of view which is appealing to him, he will understand Jesus' message more than he would from a theological tractate." (Höfer, 1997, p. 16).

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**Abstract:**

The subject of this contribution is research of the further education of teachers in Gestalt pedagogy in a European context in general; it also focuses on the teaching of religious education. The research results from the author's study of the subject in Austria at the Institute of Integrative gestalt pedagogy and religious formation, under the leadership of its founder prof. Albert Höfer.

**Keywords:** Gestalt pedagogics, education of teachers, institutes of Gestalt pedagogics, principles

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Areas of scientific interest: Drama education, Innovative methods and forms focused on spiritual formation, Gestalt-pedagogy, Matrimoniology

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