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Values development in teaching process

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VALUES DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT: *The value of human life currently ranks among the topics which are often and endlessly discussed by general public as well as by experts circles of various scientific directions. And it also belongs to subjects that have been perpetually dividing society into two camps. The first one consists of those for whom life is sacred, refusing any human interference and influence of its length. The second one is a group of those for whom quality of life is more important and when, in their view, a human life does not happen to be good enough and further suffering only „derogates" its dignity, such life is allowed to be terminated. Natural law, which exists in every human, bears up those who stand on the side of life and its dignity, on the side of those who believe the human was created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, it is important to talk about the value and dignity of human life, especially with children and young people who currently receive a great amount of often conflicting information which they cannot properly evaluate. Besides family, which is supposed to be the first source of information on fundamental issues of human life, the young people acquire information that may affect their thinking and acting also in school, principally during religious and ethical education lessons.*

KEY WORDS: *dignity, ethics, human life, youth, religion*

INTRODUCTION

The need for formation of young people´s perspectives in various, ethically and morally ambiguous situations is essential, because that is the only way they will be able to make right decisions and to adopt the right attitude based on moral values in their adult lives, once they are confronted with problems of bioethics. However, it is important to provide them with information, where human life is not considered a „property" that could be freely disposed of as something that has value only if it has been involved in the production of material goods. We must offer them a vision of the human who deserves respect at all times and in every stage of life. A view of the uniqueness and dignity of human life from the moment of conception to its natural end.

ADOLESCENCE PERIOD

„For John Paul II., youth is not only a time of life, accounting for a specific number of years. He perceives it primarily as an utterly unique wealth of man, as it simultaneously

represents the time which had been given to every human by Providence as a task. After all, during the beautiful, but also inquiet years of youth, the man reveals his human, unrepeatable «I» and associated features and capabilities. Step by step, he forms an own identity, looks for answers to basic life issues, and plans, makes first particular decisions, which will essentially affect his whole life"[1].

In biological terms, we can consider the period of adolescence as a life period flanked on one hand by first signs of sexual maturity and a significant acceleration of body growth and on the other hand by reaching full sexual adulthood and completion of somatic growth. Simultaneously with biological changes, a young person experiences significant psychological changes demonstrating an overall emotional lability, an onset of a grown-up way of thinking and attainment of universal development. These changes are also accompanied by new social inclusion of individuals, whereas society expects them to behave and to perform in a different manner as well as to adopt new social roles. The course of the psychological changes and social status of the young person are influenced by many social, economic and cultural factors as well as by educational attitudes of parents, teachers and others. Although there is a problem to synchronize the age of adolescence, since it is different for boys and for girls, in terms of today's advanced society, we can define the boundaries of adolescence by lower limit of 11 to 12 years and by upper limit of 20 to 22 years[2].

This period, however, needs some further subdivision because there is a huge distinction between being 11, which is considered being a child, and being a 22 year old adult. Most often this division distinguishes as follows:

1. The period of puberty - approximately from 11 to 15 years old. During this period, the first signs of sexual maturation show up and the physical growth accelerates.

2. The period of adolescence - approximately from 15 to 22 years old. Teenagers gradually reach full sexual maturity and the physical growth is completed, too. The position of an individual in society is significantly changed by transition from elementary school to further studies, which changes the self-perception.

Although the physical changes during adolescence period are most visible, the changes occur also in a cognitive and emotional development as well as in the area of socialization. For a young person, in order to successfully integrate and to actively participate in social life, there are decisive developmental processes of individualization and identity formation during adolescence period.

The process of individualization gradually develops with an adolescent in four stages (differentiation, experimentation, stabilization and psychological independence), through which the adolescent differs from other people, and is acknowledged as an independent and free entity[3]. Continuously, it leads to emancipation from family and to significant relations networking with contemporaries. In recent decades, a faster onset of physical maturation has manifested itself more significantly. Yet, it still does not ensure the emotional and social maturity. There is a discrepancy between the physical and social maturity, which is manifested as a postponement of marriage entry until after one graduates and acquires a job. There also exists a serious discrepancy between the values of younger and older generations, being notably caused by breakthrough scientific and technical changes which increasingly bring along more

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[1] Ľ. Stanček, *Mládež v pontifikáte Jána Pavla II.*, [in:] *Sapienciálny charakter antropológie Jana Pavla II. a európska integrácia,* ed. P. Dancák, Prešov 2007, p. 79.
[2] Cf. J. Langmeier, *Vývojová psychologie*, Praha 1998, p. 139.
[3] Cf. M. G. Glasová, *Aktuálne otázky adolescencie v psychologickej teórii a výskume*, [in:] *Adolescencia. Aktuálne otázky predčasného a predĺženého dospievania,* ed. T. Lenczová, Bratislava 2006, p. 15.

frequent differences in opinions, values and attitudes. The older generation has been putting itself to a position of traditions guardians, which has been rejected by young people as an obstacle to progress[4]. Not even in Slovak law system is the term „youth" defined. Similar terms are used in laws being related to the age limit of life which is near to the age of youth. Under the Civil Code, the crucial age is when a person reaches the age of majority, which is at 18. The Criminal Code uses the term „juvenile" from 14 to18 years and a person who is not criminally accountable - in this sense, a child under 14 years. The Labour Code uses the term „adolescent employee" - an employee under 18 years. Social security legislation laws operate with the term „dependent child under 25". The Social Protection Law applies the term „child under 18 years" and „young adults from 18 to 25 years"[5].

In sociology and other social sciences, which deal with a category of „youth", a content of this concept differs from the content of the conception of puberty and adolescence. From the perspective of sociology, the youth can be understood as an assigned status or socially formed category, though less than a simple biological form of being young. As a socio-cultural category, youth is a phenomenon of last centuries and its origin is connected with a process of industrialization, as manufacturing required professional training and an increased demand for higher education. Hence, such a time and social space had to be created, in which this training could be performed, which in practice means a constant lengthening of the youth period. Every individual, thus also a young man, is a part of society and within the society, he implements and achieves his objectives and meets his needs. The society affects him either positively or negatively[6]. Out of many definitions of youth, we have chosen the definition of Miroslava Debnáriková, which is very concise. The youth is defined as: „a socio-demographic group of population aged between 15 and 30 years with typical features and characteristics, specific interests and requirements and value orientations, which distinguish itself from other age groups. It is not a homogeneous group: its attitudes, interests and requirements primarily depend on young people´s affiliation to a social group"[7].

THE SUBJECT OF VALUES IN TEACHING PROCESS

„There is no doubt that the first and the fundamental cultural reality has been a spiritually grown-up human, hence a perfectly mannered human, the one being able to educate himself and also others. The primary and essential role of general system of education and of every culture is the upbringing, which lies in the fact that the man becomes more human, in order to be able „to be" more and not only „to have" more. And then through everything he has and owns, he could all along become a more solid person"[8]. The words of pope John Paul II. reflect very exactly a nature and aims of education of young people – to be a human being with the meaning, values and moral ideals. If we want young people to be that way, we need to educate them – to show them the importance of a proper attitude, also and predominantly in matters of morality, in issues of dignity and value of man as an object of all activities of society. The issue of value orientations of young people still poses an actual problem, being discussed in pedagogy, philosophy, ethics, sociology and psychology, as it is an

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[4] Cf. J. Langmeier, *Vývojová psychologie*, op. cit., p. 139-155.
[5] *Legislatíva pre prácu s deťmi a mládežou,* http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/ MedzirezortnePK/2007/19064/Priloha.doc [online: 21.07.2014].
[6] Cf. O. Štefaňák, *Religiozita mládeže*, Ružomberok 2009, p. 46-53.
[7] M. Debnáriková, *Sociálno-výchovná činnosť úradov práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny s mládežou,* [in:] *Mládež ako aktér sociálnej zmeny,* ed. Z. Bakošová, L. Macháček, Trnava 2009, p. 121.
[8] L. Tobiáš, *Pohľad Jána Pavla II. na výchovu – vybrané témy*, [in:] *Sapienciálny charakter antropológie Jana Pavla II. a európska integrácia,* ed. P. Dancák, Prešov 2007, p. 335.

interdisciplinary category. However, the value orientation is primarily a result of education in families, schools and in the nearest young person´s neighbourhood. The term „value" is defined differently, depending on in which scientific field it is mentioned. The term is used for „quality labelling of objects and phenomena, regardless of whether the person or people attribute the value to it. At the same time, however, the concept of value is used to indicate richness, significance, subjective relevance to a particular person. We can look at values from three angles:

- the value as the quality of things, toward which human efforts are oriented (aimed at meeting the needs of a human being),
- the value as a positive valuation of human ties (relationships),
- the value as a general criterion, based on which different objects are evaluated"[9].

In 1990, Austrian bishops issued a pastoral letter titled *Sozialhirtenbrief der katholischen Bischope Ostereichs,* in which they expressed their attitude toward social problems. They consider it very important to educate young people so that the young people can realize their responsibility for their own future as well as be confident that their responsibility and involvement in economic and social life are appreciated. It is necessary to guide them, in order to prevent them from recognizing the aim of society barely in a constant escalation of welfare, yet to guide them to learn deeper truths, values and goals, through which they are capable of exceeding their selfishness, meaning a human dignity, justice, solidarity and responsibility for the visible world[10].

Young people grow up in social relations. If they want to master their lives, they must learn how to cope with challenges that are placed upon them, to solve problems and various life situations. During adolescence, the young person is inevitably confronted with certain boundaries – social regulations, rules, standards, practices and laws. An important place in the system of factors which influence adolescence and maturation of the young man´s personality, belongs to all human and particularly moral values. What defines the social norms and rules, is simultaneously also a definition of what is right and what is good. Factors that define certain restrictions, and that guide attitudes and behaviors of an adolescent, are called *social limits*. The social limits are rules and expectations derived from the values and norms directing the young man, though if necessary, also restricting his behavior. By means of the social limits and rules of the social world defining the boundaries in acting and by protection of their freedom, the young people learn and, consciously or unconsciously, also sort their values. They demonstrate a specific attitude towards values, learn to distinguish between the good and what threatens them. Foundations of these attitudes are acquired mainly in the family from childhood and depend on the attitudes and value orientation of parents[11].

Decision making about what is ethical and what is not, has never been as difficult as today. Young people who have not yet developed well-defined opinions and who have not yet been indoctrinated, whether in their families or in the educational process by proper views on life, are confronted with a multiplicity of information or misinformation offered by the latest information technologies. As early as with primary school children, spending most of their free time with a PC and online social networks, they have been losing respect for life and as such, they do not regard it as something unique and special. Computer games have been presenting the loss of life as something normal, having thus had an impact on reducing the age limit at which attacks on others appear. Will these young people have any efforts

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[9] L. Gajdošová, *Hodnoty, postoje k hodnotám a motívy stredoškolákov*, [in:] *Rodinné prostredie ako faktor socializácie a personalizácie osobnosti dieťaťa,* ed. J. Šatánek, Banská Bystrica 2005, p. 25.
[10] Cf. Š. Mordel, *Sociálna náuka cirkvi – Propedeutika*, Prešov 2008, p. 144-146.
[11] M. Potočárová, *Mládež medzi slobodou a sociálnymi hranicami*, [in:] *Adolescencia. Aktuálne otázky predčasného a predĺženého dospievania,* ed. T. Lenczová, Bratislava 2006, p. 158.

and willingness to protect human life when becoming adults, unless they are presented the truth about murders of unborn children and old people?[12] The greatest impact on the formation and development of young person´s values has a family. Parents bear the main accountability for the education of their children, and for the values that they hand over to them. However, the current era is increasingly focused on material values and many parents spend more time and efforts with their jobs than with their families and children, in an effort to financially provide for the family. It happens that children are more influenced by their environment, school and peers and receive values of people they are frequently in contact with. There is a space opening here to influence the youth through teaching subjects. The ones dealing most with the issue of values in human life probably are the subjects of Ethics and Religious education, which are compulsory courses in the first and in the second year of secondary schools.

The subject of Religious education/Religion aims to positively influence the values orientation of students so that they become people of high moral standing, who shall be responsible to each other, to other individuals and to the whole society. The Religion subject teaches students to think critically, not to let someone manipulate with them and to understand themselves and others. While allowing them to clarify a moral view and to distinguish between what is accepted by society and what is the true moral good. To human life as the highest value is dedicated a topic of *Values of life*, which among other things aims at the following: to ask fundamental existential questions, to draw conclusions, based on the biblical text, for life of humans as a man and a woman in their indissoluble community, to defend the right of humans to live from the moment of conception, to assess the value of family and to name its threats at present, to realize dignity of human life as the first value which we are responsible for.

There is a Fullness of life topic dedicated to issues of human suffering, illness and death, in which students focus on the theme of the right to dignified dying, palliative care and its borders, but also the Christian sense of suffering. This topic is also devoted to the moral aspect of euthanasia. The aim of this topic is to lead students to ask questions about life and death, to show them perceptions of the old age, unsoundness and human suffering, to compare them with the Christian view of the man´s value and to draw conclusions for their lives. At the same time, to interpret the Church's teaching about death and the afterlife, to explain the importance of the Sacrament of the Sick, to be familiar with Christian funeral rites and to recognize a sign of the Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead in them. The explanation of this subject will help students solve problems in the light of the Church's teaching with an emphasis on ethical approach to the sick and elderly. They are able to perceive the situation of the old and sick person, and to know the values that they can be offered by such a person. The process also involves teaching about responsibility of young generations for generations of the old and sick people who require their respect and gratitude.

The students are explained a hospice care, which preserves dignified dying of the man, recognizing the value of each human life and being suitable as an alternative to the option of euthanasia[13].

The education towards values and towards respect for life is a goal of the second compulsory optional subject - Ethics. The subject is primarily focused on education for

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[12] Cf. D. Broďáni, V. Broďániová, *Eutanázia – problém nás všetkých*, [in:] *Bioetické konflikty,* ed. S. Košč, Ružomberok 2008, p. 67.
[13] Cf. *Učebné osnovy pre katolícke náboženstvo. Predmet náboženská výchova/náboženstvo pre ZŠ, SŠ a gymnáziá* - http://www.statpedu.sk/documents//24/standardy_2009/Osnovy_NV_vyssi_sekundarny_stupen_ISCED_3.pdf [online: 21.07.2014].

sociability, which is reflected in moral attitudes and behavior of pupils regulation. Development of ethical attitudes and pro-social behavior is primary for the ethical education.

It also includes the development of social skills (open communication, empathy, positive evaluation of others), as well as the promotion of mental hygiene, participates in the primary prevention of behavioral and learning disorders[14]. Ethics is intended to allow students at the appropriate level to name, explain and develop basic ethical attitudes such as self-control, positive self-evaluation and evaluation of others, communication skills, creative solving of interpersonal relationships, etc. In the teaching process, students are supposed to adopt moral values, to cultivate a positive attitude towards life and people, to be able to judge morally, to make decisions and to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Within lessons of Ethics the students will explore communication and communication skills, dignity and the value of a human person, the ethics of sexual life, relationships in the family, but also the philosophical generalization of the ethical values. There are some additional objectives to be explained to the students, such as important values and ethical standards related to life and health, family life, parenting and sexuality. The area of dignity and value of the human person involves obtaining positive experience supporting the basic confidence in oneself, autonomy and initiative. The curriculum includes exercises focused on a positive self-evaluation as well as the evaluation of others, creative solving of common situations in interpersonal relationships, esteem, and respect for other races, ethnic groups and disabled people, understanding of others, searching for positive role models in everyday life.

In the context of Ethics, it is important to make students familiar with bioethical issues, particularly with the issues relating to moral aspects of abortion, euthanasia, relationships to the sick and disabled persons, etc. The aim of Ethics is to educate the personality with its own identity and its own value orientation in which the respect for life has a significant position. Teaching Ethics is not meant to lead to a robotic memorization, but, it should provide the student with a dignified way how to become familiar with the issues, so that he understands it, so that he is able to take a critical position, as well as to solve moral dilemmas of bioethics, and as a result he concludes and argues morally[15].

Ethical and religious education have a significant place in the formation of values, as well as opinions of the students addressing ethical issues in fields of health and disease, in issues of birth control, and in many other areas. It is important that young people are offered the information from the fields of religion, ethics, bioethics, which helps find answers to questions relating to ethics as well as morality, helps find the right solutions to numerous borderline situations, though above all, the bioethics tries to focus its efforts of everyone involved on achieving the most important objective which is and must always be – the good of a person.

CONCLUSION

If we want to have not only educated but also morally formed youth, the emphasis should be placed on the development of moral values in families that have a major impact in shaping the attitudes of young people. A school still remains an important factor in building the positive attitude towards life, yet also towards the adoption of suffering and pain. Through education in the areas of moral and ethics, it helps young people find their ways through the issue of bioethics problems. Equally important is the formation of public opinion by media that influence young people's attitudes on matters of people´s rights to make decisions about

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[14] Cf. *Štátny vzdelávací program pre gymnázia v Slovenskej republike ISCED 3A* - http://www.statpedu.sk/files/documents/svp/gymnazia/isced3_spu_uprava.pdf [online: 21.07.2014].

[15] Cf. M. Mlynárová, *Učebné osnovy - etická výchova* - http://www.ssag.sk/SSAG%20study/ETV/uo.pdf [online: 21.07.2014].

their lives, on pain and suffering, but especially on the question of dignity and the value of every human life. Society has been having an impact on the attitudes of young people, as through the adoption of laws, it can help protect the inviolability of life, or vice versa, it may facilitate its termination with impunity. It is important to create such a social environment, in which people cherish their lives and receive life as a gift. They will then appreciate the lives of other people, too, even if marked by pain and suffering.

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