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# CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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## Abstract

The article presents, while giving arguments, the specific aspects of the goals of religious education, as incorporated in the integrative system of ideals, purposes and objectives of education as a whole. The multiple fundaments of educational goals, from the social-economic ones to the axiological or theological ones, cause and condition the profile of the ideal in religious education, including the Christian one. But, at the same time, the system of religious values, concepts, ideas and practices – and, implicitly, that of religious education, has a specificity having resulted from the holy tradition, from the contemporary human’s need for sacredness, for transcendence, regardless of age, as well as from the human being’s necessity for finding an answer to the complex issue regarding the meaning of its life. The theological dimension of educational goals is a crucial element in orienting education, with all its multiple facets, resulting in the religious, spiritualized human being, guided by the supreme values of universal culture.

*Keywords:* educational ideal, Christocentric principle, need for sacredness, Christian education, paradigm

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## 1. Introduction

The actionalistic theoretical perspective on education, places a great deal of importance on the *goals of educational practice*. Being institutionalized, education is an intentional process, and it implies the *anticipation of results per various lapses of time* (for instance, long-term, middle-term or short-term results), the engagement of those types of cognitive, affective, voluntary, and behavioural communication between the educator and his/her disciples, targeting the gradual attainment of goals. Thus, the initiation of concrete educative acts, the selection of teaching instruments, methods and procedures, the selection and use of information, the utilization of educational resources, the evaluation of children’s and young persons’ participation in their own accomplishment etc. are oriented by the goals of education.

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In educational practice, reference is often made to diverse concrete variants of the ultimate educational goal: the ideal of education, the educational purpose and model, general objectives, taxonomic objectives, projects, levels of aspiration, educational values - purpose, directly testable objectives etc. All these variants aim at the *personality pattern that education has to shape* – an appropriate pattern and an integral part of a certain type of culture and civilization, a value – pattern, in its turn oriented and subordinated to the societal system of values to which it pertains. Essentially, the goal of education has three main scopes: 1. *the educational ideal*; 2. *the purposes of education*; 3. *the general and operational educational objectives*. All these have the major function of orienting the educational practice, of giving sense and value to the concrete educative acts, and will have the expected effectiveness if there is a systemic hierarchy, if they are fluently and unitarily operated. The goal of the educational act bestows a certain amount of vision and perspective on the pedagogical action, as well as the necessary premises for its efficiency.

There have been theoretical positions underestimating or even denying the importance of establishing goals in the educational work, such as non-directivism, pedocentrism, free education, etc. However, neither the justifications/argumentations supporting these pedagogical doctrines, nor the practical results obtained by them can be sufficiently convincing.

## 2. The ideal of education

The *educational ideal* refers to the type of person or to the personality pattern that is appropriate to societal, cultural and civilizational needs, and which the educative practice, as a whole, as well as the educational system in a society, have to shape. As an abstract and general notion, the educational ideal has a historical stability; it stands for perfection, for the beauty of the human being, for what a human should be, it is a superior step in the system of values which all educators and all educational factors wish to achieve.

The educational ideal has a concrete and historical basis; it is that which governs the mentalities and the culture of a historical era. The ideal is the illustration of what education aims to accomplish in a human being, and it produces the attitude of society and educators towards the child, towards the human being in general.

Each social system has its specific ideal of education. In ancient Sparta, for instance, the educational ideal was embodied in the military, potent warrior type of personality. For ancient Athens, the educative ideal was the good and handsome man (*kalokagathia*), in the Middle Ages – the ideal of the knight and the Homo Religiosus. The Renaissance introduced the ideal of the multilateral, handsome, free man. Comenius proposed, in his pedagogical system, the educational ideal of the ‘erudite, virtuous and pious’ man; Rousseau – that of the ‘free and naturally good man’. J. Locke proposed, for the educational system of England, the ‘Gentleman’ model. Other pedagogues formulated a utilitarian ideal, in the sense that school has to prepare the child, the young person, for a

practical life. I. Kant focused on the moral ideal of education, so that the formation of the disciple's moral character had to prevail over all educational purposes and objectives. According to German pedagogue Herbart, education as a whole had to aspire towards the realization of a moral character. Consequently, in the coverage and realization of educational curricula, the predominant event should be the moral one, and History and religion should hold a central place in the educational content etc.

In modern and contemporary Pedagogy, a new outlook asserted itself: the *integralistic* conception of the *educational ideal*, in other words, the formation of the ultimate, ideal human being, characterized by a complete and harmonious life. In Goethe's view, for example, the educational practice has the mission of harmoniously developing all elements that compose the being and the life of a human. This might be achieved not only by means of contemplation, but particularly through activity, through personal efforts of self-improvement, through creation. Pestalozzi followed the same lines of the integral and harmonious ideal of the human individuality; he believed that the human being possessed forces and natural energies by means of which he could achieve something in life. But these energies (will, motives, intelligence etc.) must be oriented by ideal values. He admits two such directive values: faith and love. Therefore, the ideal of education is that of developing all human forces, harmonized and enlightened by morality and religiousness, by ideal values. Education will ceaselessly tend towards realizing ideal values and, most of all, faith and love. The child will thus be gradually prepared for humanity.

This perception was also disseminated in Romania in the interwar period. The illustrious professor at the University of Bucharest, G.G. Antonescu, was convinced, in agreement with the pedagogical conception of Pestalozzi, that "the ideal in education consisted of cultivating all forces that made up the psycho-physical organism of the individual, as well as the ideal values meant to inspire the former and to bestow direction upon it; in other words, education will continuously seek to realize ideal values and to idealize real forces, thus tending towards active idealism" [1]. However, it is the religious and moral values and principles that set the course for the evolution and development of the child's personality; it is them that orient the forces with which human beings are endowed by nature.

Nevertheless, education presents itself as unit of several aspects – intellectual, moral, physical, aesthetic, civic, national etc. The interweaving of these aspects is based on the unity of spiritual (cognitive, affective and volitional) processes. There cannot be a pure intellect, a pure will or pure feelings; they are always organized within a system, with a determining role of one over the others. The same situation occurs in the educational process: those who perform religious education shall also fulfil objectives of moral, intellectual, aesthetic, professional, national and family life education, etc. and vice versa. The management of the educational process is ensured by values: absolute good, love of one's neighbour, beauty, truth, justice, equity, solidarity, freedom, creation etc.

The sharpening of the social division of labour has imposed a sociological view on education, a different personality pattern as an ideal of education. According to this theory, as represented by socio-pedagogue Emile Durkheim, educational practice must respond to social needs. Consequently, the ideal of education should incorporate the multitude of biophysical, social, moral, psychological and professional traits required by the *person who is capable of being integrated into society*, the person whom society wants.

It can be inferred that in all historical ages, in all pedagogical systems, the educational ideal was focused on the human being, on what the latter should become, having a complex socio-economic, ecological, scientific, psycho-pedagogical, religious, ethical, aesthetic, historic, etc. substantiation [2].

The **socio-economic substantiation** of the educational ideal resides in the fact that a human community (a people, a nation, etc.) has the tendency to establish goals that are appropriate to its level of development, and to the volume of available resources (i.e. specialized teaching staff, specific technical means, educational facilities, money, the possibility to pay the salaries of the teaching staff, etc.). The personality pattern is thus designed so as to tally with the characteristics of the social division of labour, and with the labour market requirements. Put differently, the educational ideal is shaped in the image and likeness of its underlying society. Consequently, there is an organic connection between projects of socio-economic development and the educational ideal, the latter essentially depending on the former. A distancing of the educational ideal from these projects and from its socio-economic fundamentals would result in its having an utopian character.

The **ecological substantiation** of the educational ideal has an unsuspectedly great importance, for humankind does not create its culture and civilization in disregard of the whole of biosphere. Its future, in spite of it being the crown of the Creation, depends on the future of ecosystems, of the biosphere, of the planet. Its sovereign and supercilious attitude towards nature cannot lead to anything good. Humans will manage to prolong their existence on Terra only by protecting nature, by harmonizing their behaviours to the dynamic of ecosystems, by accomplishing ideals of good and beauty, not only in their personal existence, but also within their social group, their community, the entire natural environment on which their lives depend to a great extent. Consequently, conscience, culture, and the ecological conduct of the human being constitute an essential dimension of today's educational ideal.

The **psycho-pedagogical substantiation** of the educational ideal lies in its anchoring to the bio-psychical, psychological, moral particularities of the majority of people in the given historical era. To seek to bring about a 'new type of human being', wholly detached from human nature and the human condition of the concrete historical era, radically different from traditions and mentalities, from the soul of the people, is a utopia. The status of educators in this situation (the case of those societies with low material and social means, but with revolutionary, utopian educational ideals – 'the new type of human', for instance) becomes dramatic, or even tragic. The

results and performances of educative actions do not come to light, even if enormous efforts and heroic sacrifices are to be made. For this reason, the pedagogical substantiation of the educational ideal must take into consideration the real possibilities of educational practice for fulfilling this ideal, for transposing it into reality. The educational ideal can play the part of a guideline for action if it is contextualized, well bound to the pedagogical reality, to the level of the human condition, to the economic structure and infrastructure, if it makes a junction between what the human is and what it can naturally become, with relation to the actual requirements of the social macro-system.

The **philosophical/axiological substantiation** of the educational ideal is highlighted, among other things, by all eras of cultural prosperity. The pedagogic ideal has always been in a tight connection to the philosophical outlook, to the system of values of each historical era. The philosophical outlook, in its capacity as a synthesizing, global idea on the individual and the world, on the meaning of the life of the human being and society, as an active, militant attitude towards the present of the human condition has at its core the project of human personality and society that should be achieved. As a consequence, the ontology of humanity, the axiology, ethics, and philosophy of history come to provide a theoretical and spiritual framework for the substantiation of the ideal to be attained in educational practice, to propose criteria for judgments of value, for correlating and integrating the pedagogical ideal to the ethical, aesthetic, and religious ideal. The ideal of education will be conceived depending on the manner in which the human is perceived, on the hierarchy of titles defining it (Homo sapiens, Homo religiosus, Homo faber, Homo loquens, Homo ludens, Homo significans, Homo oeconomicus, Homo sapientissimus, etc.), this conception involving, as well, a primary way of attaining it.

An effect of the philosophical/axiological substantiation of the ideal of education is its superior correlation to the values of culture and civilization, to the opening of the pedagogical conception towards interdisciplinary measures. At the same time, philosophic rationalism bestows a tint of maximum generality, of universality on the educational ideal, which may, in certain situations, slide into utopia and romanticism. The axiological dimension also refers to the ethical, judicial and aesthetic content of the educational ideal. The ideas of good, justice and beauty constitute landmarks of value in the design of the pedagogical ideal.

The **theological substantiation** of the educational ideal has the mission of bestowing absolute perfection on the latter, of putting its form and content in connection with God, with the supreme, first and last, all-perfect and all-powerful uniqueness. The theological dimension of the educational ideal serves to guide educational practice in the direction of forming the religious human being who, being mystic, has unity as a supreme value, understands the world as a unitary whole, and constantly relates to the world in its entirety. The mental structure of the religious human is constantly oriented in the direction of creating a perfect experience of the highest value. As an ideal type, the personality of the

religious man is centered on divine values and faith, which enable him to identify the profound meanings of existence. The religious man's axis of values consists, Eduard Spranger believed, not of „knowing, but of believing” [3]. The religious man is the elevating expression of spiritual freedom. The prevision of A. Malraux – that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be religious, is in accordance with the necessity of the human to relate to a superior cause, to the highest landmarks of value, in order to be enlightened in choosing the paths to follow in life, and to find personal solutions to the profound issue of the meaning of life. The need for sacredness and transcendence of the contemporary human, to the background of financial, economic, social and moral crisis seems to increase. In this context, religious education can fulfil its functions as part of education in its entirety, turning to good account the tight correlations between *Sophia* and *Paideia*, between the attachment to lofty values and actions, between *logos* and *praxis*, in order to shape the personality of a good Christian. But religious education is of a multi- and intercultural type, which implies the recognition of and respect for differences, for the specificities of other religions. “Religion as a school discipline”, C. Cucoş said, “shall not become a launch pad for proselytism or hatred of other beliefs. It shall not transform into a means of indoctrinating or manipulating consciences.” [4]. The human's need for sacredness, for landmarks of value, must be met through culturalization and spiritualization, through the coherent promotion of all sides of education: scientific, professional, civic, moral, ecological etc.

There are personalities that are dominated by immanent mystical values and others which are oriented by transcendental mystical values. Immanent mystics develop their religious experience in the affirmation of life and in their active participation in it, whereas transcendental ones seek to achieve spiritual unity with the divine force by withdrawing from life, by adopting asceticism, or self-denial and meditation. The religious conception, in all cases, is a unifying wisdom of life, a value with an integrative and comprehensive function. Thus regarded, the theological substantiation of the educational ideal will leave its marks on educational practice. The superior human being, the seeker of paths leading to accomplishment has a religious motivation for its general conduct, and this pertains to the scope of the educational ideal. Consequently, as Dumitru Salade wrote, “religious education becomes, in an ecumenical vision, a support for spiritual, moral and civic education, closely interconnected and interdependent” [5].

Consequently, the educational ideal targets a personality pattern corresponding to the requirements of a concrete and historical culture and civilization, with a multiple substantiation, which the educational practice is called upon to fulfil in the process of its development. The ideal is a major *credo*, not only for pedagogues, but also for the society that exerts a modelling function on human beings, that animates and organizes their forces on their road to accomplishment, that eliminates the neutrality and confusion which might suppress aspirations and pedagogical optimism. At the same time, the educational ideal is an axial product of the philosophical outlook, a central value

of society and personality, in accordance with the system of values to which they adhere, having a formative role, an orienting function of enlightening the pedagogical praxis.

As a synthesis of the above-mentioned, **the ideal of today's Romanian education** is very accurately formulated in the Law of education, no. 85/1995, art.3, thus: "Education constitutes the first of national priorities and is a public service that seeks to realize the educational ideal, based on universally recognized humanistic and scientific values, on the tenets of democracy and on the aspirations of the Romanian society, and contributes to the preservation of national identity. The educational ideal of the Romanian school consists of the free, wholesome and harmonious development of the human individuality, in the formation of an autonomous and creative personality." In the *Law of National Education* – Project published on March 18, 2010, it is stated that in Romania the Law ensures the juridical framework for exerting one's fundamental right to education, and the state provides citizens with equal rights of access to all levels and forms of education without any sort of discrimination, including the criterion of religious affiliation. The principles governing the process of education in the entire educational system in Romania, particularly the principle of "independence of ideologies, religions and political doctrines" guarantee the exercise of the freedom of conscience and religious affiliation.

"The educational ideal of the system of education consists of the free, wholesome and harmonious development of human individuality, in the formation of human personality and the assumption of a scale of values required for the construction of a knowledge economy and society, for the knowledge of one's own personal development and achievements, and for the social and professional integration into a knowledge society." [*Legea Educației Naționale* – project, 18 March 2010, Title I, Art. 2 (1), p.5].

Unlike the ideal of education, the **educative purpose** has a more limited scope of action in space and time. If the ideal refers to the goal of the educational action on a macro-social, historical scale, the educational purpose concerns the goal of an action, of a series or complex of determined educative actions.

The purpose is a mental projection of the result that needs to be attained in the concrete educational practice, which is associated to the appropriate mode for the development of this practice; it, therefore, has two components - an ideational/anticipative one, and another one focusing on the structure of the pedagogical action. Thus perceived, the educative purpose has a certain scope of time, and is applicable to one branch of educational practice, at a particular age, for a certain educational discipline etc. But, the more the purpose is particularized, the more it transforms into a general objective of education, hence, the relativity of this notion.

As a directional component of activity, the purpose is elaborated on the basis of a thorough study of the situation, and of the resources of the pedagogical action, being thus defined so as to allow the selection of proper means for overcoming the obstacles to its attainment, and to suggest the measures to be

taken in order for its practical realization to be obtained. The realism of the purpose is proved by the degree to which it will be attained. The purposes of education are effective if they are thus formulated so as to allow a critical reference to the previous educational practice, thus acquiring the quality of intrinsic motives of improvements.

In accordance with the educational ideal and with the established purposes, specialists in curriculum conceive **general objectives** for different stages of life, educational levels, groups of taught disciplines etc. The **objective** is the anticipated reflection of a result in the shape of a performance; it is the acquisition to be attained by the educated one in the evolution of his/her personality. Objectives **particularize an educational purpose**, they target the obtainment of progress through learning, which, in one way or another, can be observed, evaluated, and measured.

Considering the **regulating role of educational goals** at large, the National Curriculum in Romania incorporates the goals of educational levels and the objectives of curricular cycles. The goals of pre-university educational levels are derived from the educational ideal and are formulated in the Law of national education.

The realization of a formative education depends on the establishment of teaching and learning objectives for each discipline, for groups of disciplines, for one year of study, for one cycle of education, etc. The specification of objectives (intellectual, theoretical, behavioural, affective, social, moral etc. performances) which students must reach through learning will help them to better organize their study, self-control, and self-assessment, and to regulate their learning process with respect to the requirements that they must meet. At the same time, based on the definition of the objectives, the teacher will choose the educational methods and procedures, the didactic material, the contents of the teaching act.

The **general objectives** of education (specific to disciplines, forms of education, cycles, profiles etc.) cannot be met by one educator, in one class, in one concrete activity, but are the result of common efforts by educators in that subsystem of education and are met throughout a longer period. They have the mission of indicating the direction, of guiding the educators' collective efforts. Consequently, they are not operational, meaning that they cannot be attained through the concrete educative action of one educator only. This is why, in educational practice, objectives that are specific to concrete activities, to didactic sequences of classes held by each educator, are also formulated. These bear the name of *operational objectives*, and represent the concrete targets of each didactic activity (teaching, learning, revising, proofreading etc.) Thus, the operational objectives form an obligatory suite for the attainment of a general objective, and a set of general objectives is obligatorily achieved in order to fulfil an educational purpose. Likewise, the attainment of the constellation of purposes in a certain historical era will result in the educational ideal drawing nearer. Consequently, the goals of education are organized hierarchically and systemically.



### **3. The specificity of goals in Christian education**

In Christian education, the perfect model of integral and harmonious personality which must be followed by everyone in the world that provided by Jesus Christ, the ideal of education being the realization of the communion between humans and God and the human's growth within this communion. The Christ represents the perfect paideic paradigm, the brilliant prototype of the Christian. As a consequence, the religious education aspires to guide disciples towards imitating God – absolute Holiness: „Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5.48), „I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14.6). The desirable educational model possesses certain characteristics pertaining to the superhuman. But these must be worshipped, whereas the traits, attitudes and behaviours that are transferable to human conscience must be imitated as faithfully as possible.

The Fathers of the Church, Christian philosophers and a good deal of classic pedagogues gave an exact outline to the goals of Christian education. Thus, for instance, according to Clement of Alexandria, the goal of education resides in adjusting human will to the divine will, on the path of personal accomplishment; in the words of Basil the Great, the ideal of education coincides with the goal of human existence – the preparation for eternal life and happiness in the afterworld; in the view of John Chrysostom, the ideal of education resides in the care for the redemption of the soul by ensuring spiritual purity, propriety, the moral profile of the good and fair human, in forming no less than true athletes for Jesus Christ; Augustine and Thomas of Aquino argued that education at large must be religiously oriented [6]. Likewise, the father of modern pedagogy – J.A. Comenius, was convinced that the ultimate mission of humans was the acquirement of eternal happiness in communion with God, through a gradual process of embodiment of the divine perfection into the human being.

Broadly speaking, religious education orients the human being towards the absolute, the sacred, towards perfection, that is, towards a horizon transcending reality data, giving direction and meaning to the existence. The famed historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, summarized the above by writing that “living as a human being is in itself a religious act” [7].

The different sides of education – intellectual, moral, aesthetic, economic, juridical, philosophical, ecological, professional, physical etc. are integrated and subordinated to the realization of this communion between the human being and God, started in our earthly life, by participating in the life of the Church of Christ.

Christian education comes to entirely shape the human being, the two sides of this whole – soul and body – at the same time, all the elements composing the soul and the body, placing the emphasis on the soul, on the formation and spiritual perfection of the human being. Albeit inferior to the soul, the physical aspect is not underestimated, it is not deemed a prison for the soul,

but was created to be the bearer of spiritual life. In this respect, Saint Paul, the Apostle, said that the human being was, in its entirety – as body and soul, a temple for the Holy Ghost. The religious education leads to the achievement of an utter harmony between corporeal life and the life of the soul, walking a difficult path that implies the human's continual cleansing of passions, suppression of the proclivity to sin, the cultivation and growth in the spirit of virtue, the spiritual ascension of the human through faith, the Christian-Orthodox asceticism, the correct Christian living. In this respect, the renowned specialist in the history of religious beliefs – Mircea Eliade, was convinced that "being, or rather becoming human, meant being religious" [8].

The attainment of the ideal of Christian education implies the realization, by the human, of the state of moral and bodily cleanliness, that is, the purification from passions and sins through penance, by participating in the life of the Church, in the activity of the Church in the world, by embracing religious knowledge, traditions, and culture. Gradually, the becoming human will achieve spiritual communion with the Christ, the man-God, which will open the door entirely to the Supreme Truth, Eternal Good, Absolute Beauty and Perfection, Supreme Justice and Eternal Happiness.

The cultivation of the belief in the Christ, by means of religious education, ignites and enhances one's love for God, for the Church, for people, for the entire creation. The spiritual horizon, the learners' scientific, technical, artistic, and common knowledge will become compartments sustaining a hierarchy of values having, on its top, the absolute and perfect Uniqueness – the ruler of the whole vertical of values. The progress of a child's personality will be completed and deepened as a consequence of the accumulation of the religious dimension of the conscience, of the belief in the religious/moral life, of the feelings of love for God and for one's neighbours. The formation of a religious conscience and conduct in a child, the latter's living in accordance with the model provided by the Christ will be completed by the affirmation of the truths of divine Revelation, making interdisciplinary connections, using data from all sciences, arts, Philosophy, Psycho-pedagogy, etc.

Therefore, the ideal of Christian education is, ultimately, as written by Professor Dumitru Radu, "living according to the will of God, in communion with Jesus Christ, inside His Church. The genuine Christian is a being of love and evangelical living, of a love that constantly aspires to achieve self-improvement, because of finding, every moment, new reasons for loving God and people. In this way, the Christian proves, since an early stage in his/her life that the love for God gives birth to the love for people. But the love for people and the love for God are like two wings of the same soul, of the Christian soul; two flames of the same fire, the fire that annihilates sin and sustains the human's ascension to God, as well as the advance towards our neighbour, through acts of abnegation and sacrifice." [9]

Having such dimensions, the educative ideal is the superior prototype in the educational conscience of the society, which, in its turn, establishes limits and a road to follow for its development, and can become a decisive factor in the life of students if it is clearly and convincingly put forward, can unleash the impetus and energies of youth, marking the complexity of the students' psychical life, can produce changes of attitudes, according to the code of Christian morals, can generate optimism, confidence and perseverance in the efforts intended for the self-improvement of the personality, for the well-balanced integration in society, in the spirit of total respect for the dignity of one's fellow creatures. It will thus come to the confirmation of the creed of the great classic pedagogue J. H. Pestalozzi, that "the human becomes human only through education" [10] and the supreme ideal in education consist of ennobling the human being, which is made possible by the love of people and the strengthening of faith.

The young persons' adherence to the ideal of Christian education is, at the same time, a strong motive for enriching their spiritual life through learning, for strengthening their attachment to the values of national culture and civilization, of universal historical traditions.

The attainment of the ideal of Christian education through pedagogical practice requires tact and mastery of the educating priest or of the catechist, the use of pedagogical resources according to the specificity of the educational situation, the choice of an appropriate educational style, depending on individual or age-related particularities, the observance of pedagogical principles and laws etc. But the educator will also apply two specific principles of religious education: **the ecclesiological principle and the Christocentric principle**. The former requires the performance of any educative activity, lesson or catechesis in the Church, in agreement with the spirit and life of the Church, the selection of educative contents in such a way that they might awaken faith in the souls of children and young persons towards the omnipotence of God, the seeding of convictions regarding the truths of Christianity, whereas the latter, namely the Christocentric principles, implies that all didactic measures taken by the educating priest or by the teacher of religion should underline the fact that the Christian religion has Jesus Christ, the man-God at its centre – the source of energy, power and life of a Christian [11].

With regard to the **objectives of religious education**, the same criteria can be applied for their classification. To simplify things, we shall consider the elements of content in religious learning to be focused on two groups of objectives:

- **informative**, instructive **objectives**, or what the student must **know** at the end of the lesson or another didactic activity;
- **formative**, educative **objectives**, or what the students must **be able to do** at the end of the didactic activity.

For the fulfilment of objectives in the first group, the educator shall ensure an educational content of an informational, cognitive essence. This kind of informative, instructive contents is primarily addressed to the memory, and the objectives targeting them can be stated through appropriate verbs, such as: students must bear in mind, remember, recognize, acquire, identify, name, reproduce, repeat etc.

In order to accomplish formative objectives, the educator shall primarily select the educative contests of learning: skills, abilities, capacities, emotions, feelings, convictions, attitudes, interests etc. What the student must be able to do can be stated in verbs expressing psychical forces, progresses in the students' conduct, knowledge comprehension and application skills, moral virtues, the level attained by religious conscience. The gradual approach to the realization of the ideal, purpose and objectives of Christian education, by the agency of teaching and learning religion in school, is rendered objective in the spiritualization of the human, the internalization of religious values and culture, in the formation of the spiritual ego centred around faith, feelings and attitudes, guided by transcendental values and especially in real-life, social and civic behaviours, concordant to the Christian norms and canons, to the divine commandments.

#### **4. Unity and diversity in projecting the ideal of Christian education**

A projection of the ideal of Christian education in a unitary vision is only possible at a high level of abstractization, generalization and essentialization. The Christian religion, as it is practiced at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is not unitary, from many points of view: axiologically, doctrinally, as tradition, rituals and ceremonies being practiced, as degree of involvement in social and health issues of the faithful, openness to modernization, relation to the major issues of humankind and contemporary society (globalization, knowledge society, preservation of peace and prevention of conflicts, fundamental human rights, humans' attitude to the environment – in its broadest sense, as a the 'crown of divine creation', etc.), as legal status, degree of tolerance to other beliefs etc.

The world's religious life is today divided into tens of official traditional religions and into thousands of sects, branches, factions, currents descending from the former. The contextualization of the educational ideal depends in this diverse scope of religious cults and orientations, considering the individuals freedom of affiliation to the desired religious life, or lack thereof, generates a diversification, a differentiation of purposes, of the general and operational objectives of religious life according to cults, sects, orientations, rituals. On an original, essential and general scale, the ideal of Christian education is a spiritual dome that covers and gives direction and identity to all Christian cults and orientations, by relating to other important religions of humanity. But the religious life of each cult, of each sect has certain content- and organization-related connections to specific social environments.

The process of ecumenization, the tendency to promote universal values of Christianity, the general ideal of Christian education - in competition with the contrary evolutionary process – that of differentiation, diversification, particularization, are illustrated by the historical evolution of the great religions, not only that of Christianity. A relevant example in this sense is the emergence and evolution of the Christian Orthodox Church and of the other cults in the Romanian lands. During the 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially on the territory of today's Dobrogea, the Christian teachings were preached in a unitary vision by Saint Andrew, the Apostle, and Saint Philip, the Apostle. Their educative mission was that of being 'apostles of the Romanized Dacians', propagating the values and doctrinal content of Apostolic Christianity. The Christianization of the indigenous Dacian population and of the Romans colonists was a gradual process, the new faith being propagated by the Apostles and several missionaries so that the Romanian people, as well as the Greek one, was formed as a Christian community, linked to Rome by language and to Constantinople by faith and organization.

The unity of the educational ideal, of faith and religious vision was preserved until the 'Great Schism' of 1054 between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Catholic one. The effects were not too tardy. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholicization process began, particularly in Transylvania. During the Middle Ages, the process of religious differentiation was enhanced by the increase in the number of Judaic and Islamic adherents. After 1543, when the Diet of Transylvania proclaimed, in Cluj, religious freedom for all citizens of the country, and following the advent of Martin Luther's Reform, the first Evangelical/Lutheran centres appeared, followed by Calvinist, Unitarian etc. ones, so that in Romania, according to the 1930 census, the percentage of faiths with respect to the total amount of the population was the following: 72% Orthodox; 7.9% Greek Catholics; 6.8% Roman Catholics; 3.9 Protestants; 2.2 Evangelic/Lutherans; 0.4% Unitarians; 0.4% Lipovans; 4.2% Judaic; 1% Muslims; Gregorian Armenians, Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Gospel Christians existed in a negligible number. The last censuses (1992, 2002) confirmed the tradition structure of religious affiliation of the Romanian population, but with certain changes, such as: the increase in the percentage of Orthodox population to 86.8%, significant growth of the percentage of Pentecostal, Baptist, 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist believers and atheist, to the detriment of other confessions [12].

Detachment from the common trunk of Christianity, from the one faith and vision preached by Jesus, by the Apostles of Christian teachings, by numerous Protestant and Neo-protestant Churches, the continuous process of proliferation of new sects and religious orientations raise many issues regarding the ideal of Christian education, not only in the doctrinal, scientific (in the Sociology of religions or in the Psychology of religious life, for example), or philosophic planes, but also in that of educational sciences referring to the goals of religious education, such as: Is the concept of ideal of Christian education possible and necessary from a theoretical and methodological point of view?

Can purposes, general objectives and operational objectives be formulated for Christian education in general, so long as its content is so much divided among beliefs and sects? Is the projection of an ideal of Christian education, of the goals of religious education in general, compatible with the citizen's freedom of conscience, of religious faith? Will the introduction of religion in all degrees of pre-university education, as is the case of Romania, not have discriminatory effects, based on the criterion of religious affiliation? In the context where 13 Christian religions exist, in the case of Romania, is it necessary to draw up as many pedagogies of religious life, as many goals and taxonomic objectives, specific to every denomination? Will the teaching of all these religions in school, the use of specific didactic materials and denominational marks for decorating the ambient in the educational unit (demanded by students and parents who pertain to one or another of the various cults), not generate rivalries, jealousies, interfaith conflicts among adherents?

All these issues are extremely delicate and subtle, if we should tackle from the perspective of the psychology of personality and religion, if we wish to attain a formative effect, in a spiritual and moral plane, for the teaching of religion in pre-university education. As religion is a humanistic discipline, focusing primarily on faith, on justifications of another logical nature than the psycho-cognitive mechanism specific to positive sciences, if it is not taught professionally by people with a vision on the world, cultures and civilizations, who know how to prize universal value over particular and individual ones, then it might come to perverse, undesired effects, the first among these being interfaith hatred and enmity.

Putting the specific educational ideal at the 'top' of the hierarchy of goals of religious education provides coherence not only for the progress of concrete, daily educative events, but also for a well-balanced coordination, a judicious hierarchy of general and operational objectives, by relating them to the purpose assumed to be attained in shaping the personalities of the subjects of the educational act. The 'Sermon on the Mount', delivered by the Saviour Jesus Christ in front of the crowds, has a unique message, is addressed to all, it proclaims universal principles (commandments): love for one's neighbours, Christian solidarity, sacrifice, spiritual purity, justice, peace within the soul and in society, forgiveness, happiness, good deeds, repentance, Christian humility, the spirit of sacrifice generated by the love for one's neighbours etc. These are defining principles for the project, the ideal of Christian education in general. The interpretations and means of accomplishing this ideal are very different and uneven from a formative point of view. Likewise, the diversity of general and, especially, operational objectives is wide. Naturally, such relations should also function between Christianity – as a universal religion, and its various denominational components.

The unitary ideal of Christian education is compatible to the diversity of general and operational objectives specific to Christian denominations. Ensuring the balance between the unity and the diversity of Christian educational goals is a necessity in the context of pluralistic democracy, which presupposes the

application of an equal, equidistant, non-discriminatory treatment of cults by state authorities, the respect for the freedom of conscience of any person, the avoidance of any form of proselytism or psychological pressure on students, the separation of the catechetical function (which pertains to cult institutions) from the pedagogical one (which is subject to school regulations), the creation of an appropriate climate for dialogue and for the elimination of any interfaith disputes, the promotion of Christian culture, value, ethical system and lifestyle, laying the emphasis on what is common to and unite the various Christian cults.

## **5. Conclusions**

By way of conclusion, the goals of religious education have specific aspects, generated by the need for sacredness and transcendence of the contemporary human, by the embracing of spiritual values, as axiological landmarks for choosing the path to follow in life, for solving the intricate issue of the meaning of human life on earth. The ideal, purpose and objectives of Christian education stem from the tradition of the Holy Church and acquire a practical, functional value, through a tight relationship with the general goals of education, through the blending of religious education with the other sides of education in general, by complying with the principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and of the *Constitution of Romania*.

The ideal of Christian education, to the extent to which it is lived and assumed, becomes an axis in the formulation of purposes and objectives in the teaching/learning of religion, the backbone of spiritualization, of the coordination of the process of shaping the personality in ontogenesis. Consequently, the results will be the final products of pre-university education: superior characters centred around the love for one's neighbour, the avoidance of sins and unlawfulness, the tolerance of other beliefs, around forgiveness, piousness and solidarity to those in need, around the observance of divine commandments and of the norms of the lawful state. All these exclude practices of religious proselytism and conscience manipulation, bigotry, fanaticism and intolerance.

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