
THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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(Received 22 January 2019, revised 19 June 2019)

Abstract

Modern society is marked by crisis of spiritual values among young people. However, young people can create happy families and a developed state on the basis of renewed mind. The problem can be solved by including spiritual component into the training process of university. Biblical values can be integrated into courses of the Humanities and Social sciences. The authors have conducted the research in four universities in Ukraine. In order to estimate the level of the development of spiritual values among university students, it has been used the method E. Pomytkin. The result of the study demonstrates that students give preference to family values. The challenge is that university students do not have enough spiritual knowledge to create good families. Therefore, it becomes necessary to develop and introduce a program for the spiritual development in the training process of higher education in Ukraine. Thus, the topics 'The Bible as the Word of God', 'Good and Evil', 'Contemporary Anthropological Problems', 'The meaning of life in the context of political understanding', 'Gender problems and the Modern Family' and the trainings 'Appreciate life', 'My words' and 'Lifelong Marriage' are included in the course of 'Philosophical Problems of Biology', 'Psychology', 'Ethics and Aesthetics'.

Keywords: spirituality, biblical, values, humanities, social sciences

1. Introduction

Modern youth is influenced by antinomical tendencies. "Evil has not only increased, but has taken on new forms. Ungodliness, insolent behaviour, ingratitude, cruelty, and irresponsibility are problems that people suffer from in the third millennium. There is no God in this system, but only selfishness, cynicism, self-glorification combined with stubborn ambition and the sole purpose of self-enrichment. Atheism in the heart created atheism in the mind,

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which led to a terrible consequence – the absence of the fear of God, that is, a deep crisis of the spirituality of mankind.” [1]

We also can see the diminishing of spiritual values among university students. They do not know biblical teachings, which are the basic principles of any success. This is unfortunate as the building of civil society is impossible without the spiritual and moral revival of the Ukrainian nation. Ukrainians have long cherished family values. Before the Soviet system, in many families the Bible had been a source of wisdom and a happy life. For the past 100 years, however, the concept of true spirituality has disappeared from Ukrainian family because of the secular policies of communist power. The Decree of the President of Ukraine, No. 580 of 13.10.2015 ‘On the Strategy of National and Patriotic Education of Children and Youth for 2016-2020’, states that there is “a lack of spirituality and morality in society”. P. Poroshenko insists on “the introduction of educational subjects of a spiritual and moral nature as the basis for the formation of personality and national-patriotic education” <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/5802015-19494>].

The spiritual idea of the supremacy of God was proclaimed as far back as in P. Orlyk’s Constitution: “From the beginning of the world, He is strange and incomprehensible in his purposes; he is merciful in longsuffering, fair in punishment and always righteous in the measure of his justice. He elevates some states and nations, while abasing others for sins and lawlessness. He enslaves some, makes others free, and lowers still others.” [Pylyp Orlyk, *The Pacts and the Constitution of the Rights and Freedoms of the Zaporozhian Host*, <http://gska2.rada.gov.ua/site/const/istoriya/1710.html>] Modern youth “can create a happy family and a developed state, but on the basis of renewed thinking. If spiritual components are included, students can gain spiritual knowledge in the training process.” [2]

Biblical values can be integrated into courses of study such as English, Philosophy, Ethics and Aesthetics, Psychology, Political Science, etc. Therefore, the relevance of the study is a requirement of elaboration and implementation of a program of spiritual development in teaching subjects of social and humanitarian direction.

2. Discussion

The researcher E. Pomytkin observes that coming to an “understanding of the unity of being, of one’s life mission, and taking responsibility for one’s life and individual activities take place during the process of spiritual development” [3]. Man was created by God to be a perfect unity of spirit, soul and body. The human trinity, as reflecting the Holy Trinity is shown in the Bible: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5.23) [Bible, King James Version].

O. Negru and A. Mustea have studied the understanding of spirituality by Psychology students of one of the universities in the Western part of Romania. 25 participants took part in the study. The researchers distinguished five major themes which reflect how participants define spirituality: “spirituality as personal development, spirituality as inner personal world, spirituality as a relationship between the individual and the divine, spirituality as an unseen world beyond our world and the intrinsic interdependence between spirituality and religiosity” [4, p. 58]. Some of the students (the participants were coded) explained spirituality in this way: “This relation can refer to a search for the Divinity – ‘the spiritual man is the one that searches for the Divinity’ (s2) and closeness to the Divinity – ‘how close I feel to God and how much I respect what He tells us through His words’ (s9). The intrinsic quality of this relation resides in its authentic, personal nature, as it means ‘to have a relation with God, an authentic experience’ (s22), ‘a close relation’ (s23) and a ‘personal link to God’ (s25).” [4, p. 59]

It should be noted that M. Antonets (one of the authors of the current paper) gives a similar definition: “Spirituality is a relationship between God and man. This follows from a deep understanding of the meaning and consequences of the act of Jesus Christ. Spirituality is a mutual work of the Holy Spirit and the human person.” [5]

In the Biblical narrative, the result of this process is maturation of the fruit of the Spirit in the character of the human being – “but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5.22-23) [Bible, King James Version].

Many events devoted to the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Ukraine influenced the education system and revived the spirituality of Ukrainians. O. Romanenko and R. Sheremeta state that “the Reformation fundamentally has changed the church, the state, business, culture, politics, law and science in countries where people supported it” [6]. Yet, “the Reformation is the search for truth, which is fully revealed in the Holy Scripture. This is a return to biblical truths. This is a desire for unification, an internal process leading to spiritual changes that influence the development of the personality and therefore change society.” [1]

Modern reformation of education should be carried out on the basis of the works of John Amos Comenius. In ‘The Pampaedia’ he writes: “So, we have a clear separation of human nature into five parts: 1) power of mind, wisdom; 2) power of language, oratory; 3) ability to work; 4) moral norms, good behaviour; 5) the goodness on earth as afforded by God’s mercy and reaching blessed eternity with God by His mercy” [Comenius, *Pampaedia*, III.10, 34]. In view of this, D. Smith says that “education that corresponds to our human nature, must give knowledge, virtue and piety, because all these three aspects are not isolated goals, but constitute an integrated whole that works better in harmonic unity” [7].

The goal of this paper is to show the practicality of the introduction of a program for the spiritual development of university students in the context of studying the Humanities and Social sciences.

In order to estimate the level of the development of spiritual values among university students, we have used the method ‘Accomplishment of desires’ (by E. Pomytkin) designed to identify the level of consciousness and the spiritual value orientation of the person. According to the method, respondents are offered a list of sixteen values among which are individual, family, social and spiritual ones. Respondents should number the values in decreasing order of preference from one to sixteen. Analysis of students’ response can show what values for them are priorities and what place spiritual values occupy in their value orientation; these are loyalty, sincerity, help, and harmony with nature [3, p. 117].

3. Results

The research was conducted in 2016-2017 among students of Poltava State Agrarian Academy (PSAA), Poltava National Pedagogical University (PNPU), Poltava University of Economics and Trade (PUET) and Poltava Ukrainian Medical and Academy (UMSA). As a result of the survey, the respondents from all the above-mentioned universities gave priority to family values. Unfortunately, the students did not exercise a preferential choice of spiritual values. While it is gratifying to note that the young people want a good family, they lack knowledge to create such a family because of poor spiritual values.

For example, only 17% of fourth year students of the Psychological and Pedagogical Faculty of specialty ‘Psychology’ of PNPU showed a high level in the development of spiritual values (LDSV) against the background of a high level of development of family values (LDFV) in 73% of participants of the experiment. The results of the research of students of UMSA showed that only 15% of respondents had a high LDSV, and 67% had a high LDFV.

First year students specialized in such branches as ‘Personnel Management and Labour Economics’, ‘Hotel and Restaurant Business’, ‘International Economics’, ‘Finance’, ‘Tourism Philology’, ‘Commodity Research and Trade Activity’, ‘Trade analysis in customs’ of PUET also displayed a high level of development of family values – more than 50%.

Psychological diagnosis of LDSV in spring of 2018 at Poltava State Agrarian Academy again showed priority in the choice of family values. Sixty five percent of fourth year students of the Faculty of Technology of Production and Processing of Livestock Products had a high LDFV, and 43% of them had a high LDSV. 38% of second year students of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine chose spiritual values, while 55 % chose family ones. A high LDFV was found in 73% of second year students specialized in ‘Accounting and Taxing’ and a high LDSV was found in 27%. Second year students specializing in ‘Finance,

Banking and Insurance' also showed a high LDFV – 86%. It is a pity that they had only 14% of LDSV.

Our research shows that students desire to have good families, but do not have enough spiritual knowledge to create them. As a result, we can see a substantial increase in divorce rates and the destruction of the family as an institution. Over the past two years, during scientific conferences and family forums in different cities of Ukraine, where the participants included representatives of education, priests, psychologists, social workers, there was reoccurring question in the audience: 'What values are young people choosing today?' Unfortunately, the answer was one and the same: 'Individual values'. We would like a mature Ukrainian society to have a better sense of the current trends in the development of students as persons.

Value is any material or spiritual phenomenon that is important for a particular person or society for which he/she acts, spends energy, time, money, health, and even is ready to sacrifice him/herself. As G. Dvoretzka observes, "it is of a characteristic of a certain object to satisfy some human need. This characteristic is reflected in human imagination as a positive significance of this object. People can often sacrifice everything to possess it." [8]

Values contain cognitive and emotional components, knowledge and evaluation. T. Titova believes that "through the process of assimilation of social experience, values develop in interests, orientations, serving as an important factor in regulation of person's behaviour and interpersonal relations" [9].

Basic, universal human values include the values of good, freedom, benefits, truth, creativity, beauty, and faith. The final value is a good as the unity of truth, goodness and measure. The good is the highest life direction of a person. It generalizes in itself the highest goal of his/her existence and a way of life. The consciousness of oneself as a part of one's unique being is expressed in values of spirit and freedom.

Higher values reflect the fundamental relations and needs of people, and form the foundation of an individual worldview. Higher values can be health, family, love, freedom, peace, war, state, labour, truth, honour, contemplation, creativity, etc.

What way should we develop universal human values, including spiritual ones, in university students? We believe this can be based on a particular kind of knowledge. In light of this and the results of our study, it becomes clear that in universities it is necessary to introduce a program for the spiritual development of students. Teachers can teach spiritual truths by integrating them into such courses as 'The philosophical problems of Biology', 'The philosophy of current global problems', 'Political Science', 'Psychology', 'Ethics and Aesthetics'.

The topic 'The Bible as the Word of God' introduces students to the most significant and influential book in all of human history. It describes the 'intelligent design' of the creation of the world and man, as well as the fall, salvation through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the means of man's sanctification. M. Savchyn observes that "faith has its ontological preconditions, because the world in which man lives is a demonstration of the omnipotence and

wisdom of God” [10]. The relevance of the Bible is in its proclamation of basic spiritual principles for life and the path to salvation.

The topic ‘Contemporary Anthropological Problems’ is included in the course ‘Philosophical Problems of Biology’. The concept of S. Golovin on the origin, essence and purpose of man in the world is taken as a basis. He highlights the concept of worldview through simple questions: “Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What will happen to me later?” [11].

M. Savchyn states that “Philosophical thought has formulated the same views on man, while often misrepresenting his essence. In rationalism and natural science in general, there is a limited understanding of man and his abilities.” [10, p. 4] It is known that Philosophy is searching for the truth. It gives answers to the question: ‘What is the meaning of life?’ Also, philosophers have been asking themselves the questions, starting with Socrates: ‘What is man and what should he do in order to achieve happiness?’ However, S. Golovin demonstrates the features of the creation of man and proves that “he has a system of attributes that distinguish him from animals – attributes that belong to the spiritual sphere” [11, p. 69].

When studying the discipline of ‘Psychology’, students take a look at the main issue of this science in the context of three aspects: psychophysiologic, psychognostic and human problems. This problem can be solved by explaining to students that true spirituality exists. L. Hrydkovets says that “the understanding of spirituality in Christian psychology requires a deeper, intimate interaction between a person and his Creator, and is the basis for the development of spiritual values. Christian psychology is inherently Christ-centred because of the fact that the Creator Himself descends to man wounded by sin in order to bring him/her out of the darkness of hell.” [12] Psychology is the science of the soul; taught well, a teacher shows the trichotomy of man as revealed in the Bible, that is, he is a unity of spirit, soul and body. Man is God’s creation. He/she came into being not because of sudden processes of evolution, but as a result of God’s conscious and intentional work.

We can see that starting with the book of Genesis and ending with the book of Revelation the Lord motivates people to create: “In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth” (Genesis 1.1); “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21.5) [Bible, King James Version]. For this purpose, we offer a coaching course entitled ‘You are special’ (certificate of author’s rights № 38186 dated April 27, 2011). The goal of this coaching is to believe in yourself as a person who is valuable in the eyes of God and find your own means for achieving good results and discovering your calling in life. It is often said that each person has a unique purpose of life that he/she must achieve, but the real destiny of man is to ultimately fulfil God’s call.

The doctrine of vocational calling is one of the basic principles of the European Reformation. Students are taught that they can find their calling primarily in the professional sphere. Careful performance of work is part of serving fellow beings. H. Skovoroda elaborated on the unique call from God. He considered the labour process as pleasure and a source of happiness,

regardless of its results, when such labour is seen as internally 'related' to the person. Distinguishing between people who are engaged in 'related' and 'unrelated' work in this sense is the most profound idea, which we can use for solution to modern problems of mankind [13]. The concept of this outstanding philosopher is to understand that mankind can be united only by social labour and the fulfilment of one's calling as a person. 'Unrelated labour' is a source of degradation of both a person and the whole society.

Teaching the topic 'Good and Evil' is based on the concept of dichotomy. Good and evil are the main categories of the discipline 'Ethics and Aesthetics'. S. Golovin explains that this dichotomy is "not in the conditional and unconditional division of human nature into autonomous components, but in the unconditional and antagonistic division between the categories of 'sin' and 'holiness', covering all aspects of the essence of man" [11, p. 77].

David Gooding and John Lennox say that "original mortal sin that corrupted the human race in the earliest days of history is not only disobedience to the Creator, but also a conscious attempt to become independent from God, that is, to become a god, a master of one's life and learn to distinguish between good and evil" [14]. Since man rejects God, evil destroys the world. However, for every bad thing that happens, a dozen good things happen. It is often believed that one should develop only the good that is already present in man's nature. It is thought that if you do good things, you will be in paradise after death. This is a mistake. The essence of sin is self-destructiveness at the deepest levels of a person beginning from birth as a consequence of the choices made in the Garden of Eden. Salvation is possible only after repentance. The ability to truly develop goodness in oneself and destroy evil begins with repentance, that is, being 'born from above'. The words of Christ are clear: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3.3) [Bible, King James Version]. This new birth is the beginning of the way to holiness.

While studying 'Political Science', it is advisable to consider the topic 'The meaning of life in the context of political understanding'. Students of the course are taught that the successful development of a civil society depends on the actions of everyone. It is necessary to acquaint students with the way which the Preacher points to in the book of Ecclesiastes: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiast 12.13) [Bible, King James Version].

If a student understands the right meaning of life, he/she will more easily take responsibility for leadership of the state in the future and he/she will use power for the benefit of mankind. H. Vashchenko says that national education should be based on "service to God and the country" [15]. This motto is the best motto for a patriotic education program. Nowadays Ukrainians have a very important renewed task, the same task mentioned by as H. Vashchenko: "To raise our spiritual culture, education, science and art to a high level, to become equal with the progressive peoples of Europe and America" [15].

Ethics, or Moral Philosophy, is concerned with questions of how people ought to act, and the search for a definition of right conduct (identified as the one causing the greatest good) and the good life (in the sense of a life worth living or a life that is satisfying or happy) [*The Basics of Philosophy*, https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_ethics.html, accessed 12.06.2019]. We believe that every man is pursuing his goal in the lifetime. On the way, he does good deed, wants happiness, and improves himself. According to Battista Mondin “a goal is finally identified with goodness, goodness that we own, corresponds to happiness, then we define the full possession of goodness by the term ‘perfection’. Human behaviour builds an object of morality: the latter is intended to teach a person to be a true master of himself and his deeds, to control his own actions aimed at achieving the true blessing of a person himself, that is, his happiness.” [16]

Ethical problems of modern society are studied in the context of the courses ‘Ethics and aesthetic’ and ‘Philosophy of global problems of the present’. Morality as a form of social consciousness has its own criteria. According to H. Vashchenko, these criteria divide the system of morality into autonomous and heteronomous. He notes that in autonomous systems actions are based on duties or conscience. “Heterogeneous moral systems estimate actions by external motives. Therefore, for a person, who adheres to such a system of morality, the first thing is the consequences of an act – satisfaction or dissatisfaction, joy or suffering, benefit or harm.” [15, p. 18]

Heterogeneous morality leads to a dictatorship of relativism. Gabriela Kuby states that “when an era recognizes itself as a supporter of relativism in the sphere of morality, law and religion, there is absolutely no fair criterion” [17]. In relativistic terms, the state’s goal is not the realization of the public will, but the will of the majority.

Because of this ideology, every society in the world suffers from problems of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, orphanhood, abortion, physical assault, economic and psychological violence, war, many diseases, filthy communication, depression, the destruction of the traditional family consisting of a man, a woman and their children. In lectures and tutorials ethical problems are considered along with their causes and means for solving them. For example, modern society faces a serious problem – sex before marriage, even among teenagers. Such behaviour results in HIV infection, as well as AIDS.

In this regard, students were offered the training entitled ‘Appreciate life’ (certificate of author’s right № 83568 dated December 11, 2018). The motto of the training is “If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain” (Proverbs 24.11) [Bible, King James Version]. The first task of the training is to promote an idea of successful avoidance of risky behaviour of sexual activity before marriage. The coaching is designed to help young people learn about negative consequences of sexual intercourse before marriage, understand the benefits of reasonable behaviour and develop character traits that are necessary for sexual abstinence before marriage. The sinfulness of consensual union as well as marital infidelity are explained to

students. The Bible says: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thessalonians 4.3) [Bible, King James Version]. A person should have right information about HIV infection. At present time many lives are at risk due to lack of information about AIDS. That is why the second task of the ‘Appreciate life’ program is to give clear and true information about HIV and AIDS.

Also, the coaching ‘My words’ is relevant for young people, which has a certificate of author’s right № 43338 dated April 17, 2012. The purpose of the program is to teach students to watch their language and try not to say dirty words. Coach ends the program with a call from the Bible: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4.29) [Bible, King James Version].

These days abortion is being discussed among the problems of bioethics. Life is given by God and no one has the right to attempt a man’s life. The importance of preserving a child’s life is explained to students. Unfortunately, abortion is a common occurrence for many people. However, abortion is a real murder, is a violation of God’s commandment “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20.13) [Bible, King James Version].

In the topic ‘Gender problems and the Modern Family’ the difference between the concepts of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ is presented. Gabriele Kuby observes that “there is a new word that serves to separate sexuality from the polarity of a man and a woman and leaves it at the discretion of the individual: gender. This refers to ‘social’, freely chosen ‘sex’, as opposed to the biological sex, which means sex difference between a man and a woman’. She outraged over the position of gender activists, whose goal is ‘unisex’ and ‘floating identity’. ‘Transgender’ attacks ‘inflexible norms of bisexuality’. They want to legally recognize the fact of choosing sex not biologically but at will, which must be indicated in official papers.” [17, p. 45] Gabriele Kuby believes that “all this happens in the name of an ideology that denies that a person exists as a man and a woman. This polarity determines her/his identity and is a condition for the continuation of the human race. There has never been such an ideology that would be aimed at destroying male and female sexual identity and any ethical rationing of sexual behaviour. This ideology is called gender mainstreaming.” [18] In contrast to such an ideology, the training ‘I am mother’ is designed to show the spiritual and social meaning of the role of mother in modern society [19].

In order to counter gender tendencies, ‘Lifelong Marriage’ coaching (certificate of author’s right № 85348 dated February 5, 2019) is offered in the class of Psychology and Ethics. God created a family from Adam and Eve – a first and genius pattern of relationship between people. Finally he mentioned the rules and goals of a happy marriage: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2.24) [Bible, King James Version]. In light of this, John Stott defined marriage as “a permanent, single, heterosexual union publicly proclaimed” [20]. Applying

the critical apparatus of Christian psychology, we have developed the coaching based on three conceptions. The first conception is the approaches of understanding love represented by Myles Munroe [21].

The second conception is a five-step model, which Dag Heward-Mills presents for spouses: “1) One man – one woman, that is, based on the above mentioned biblical verses; 2) Leaving home and cleaving to each other; 3) Friendly relations; 4) ‘Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled’ (Hebrews 13.4) [Bible, King James Version]; 5) Sexual relations and the continuation of the genus” [22].

The third conception of P. Polishchuk is sacramental intimacy. He notes that “the closer each partner is to God, the closer their union is. The growth in faith, hope and love before God promotes the growth of spouses in the same sense.” [23]

Student youth can study the Christian principles of creating a family, get acquainted with biblical approaches to communicating with people of the opposite sex. Participants will understand that a strong family is based on love. Therefore, it is important to introduce a problem lecture ‘Understanding Love’ to show the failure and harmfulness of modern relativism in understanding of the category ‘love’. This lecture has a certificate of author’s right № 54853 dated May 16, 2014.

4. Conclusions

Happiness for many people is a state when a person’s desire corresponds to real situations and events or when actions produce a desired result. However, spiritual person is happy because he/she has a relationship with God and knows that He likes his behaviour.

Unfortunately, the majority of students have a low level of development of spiritual values and a high level of development of family values. The results of the research show that young people want to create a happy family, but they do not know how to do this, because of lack of knowledge, including spiritual ones. As a result they face many problems in the future.

Accordingly, there is a requirement of implementation of a program of the spiritual development in teaching and learning process of humanities and social sciences for students of university. The application of Christian principles in educational process on the basis of creative approach leads to working out some efficient methods, programs and technologies in education. Lecturers show the ways to create a strong marriage. They purposefully form biblical values among students based on God’s worldview model. Educators, who are also representatives of religious community, have a special responsibility for the future of the younger generation.

Acknowledgement

Dr. Olha Romanenko (Delegate of the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers) is acknowledged for the support during the study conducting.

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