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Modern Problems with Formation of Children's Spirituality and Religious Education in Ukrainian Families

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Abstract

This paper reveals the low level of formation of Ukrainian children's spirituality which is proved by the results of investigation. It uses data gathered from theoretic search and empirical investigation (data gathered from 31 Ukrainian families, from children and their parents). The results have shown parents' understanding of necessity to form their children's spirituality, but lack of their time and possibilities to realize religious education in families (which is caused by difficult social-economical, moral-judicial, cultural-educational conditions in Ukraine). According to the results of investigation, the reasons of the low level of formation of Ukrainian children's spirituality are disclosed. They are parents' lack of attention to religious education and insufficient work in this direction; parents' inattentiveness, absence of their wish and possibilities to communicate with their children; lack of proper example (by parents) for forming children's spirituality; parents' oppression of the spiritual foundations, which aim to appear in children, through imposing stereotypes, excessive moralization, offenses, rebukes, mocks, authoritarian style of communication in families.

Key words: Children; spirituality; Ukrainian families; religious education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern Ukrainian children grow up in difficult social-economical, moral-judicial and cultural-educational conditions, as Ukrainian modern society with all its peculiarities (informatization and computers, children's excessive intellectual load in educational system, demographic and cultural crisis, formation of consumer behaviour model, etc.) influence them greatly. Under these conditions some elements of moral and spiritual culture become difficult to form, but they still remain very important for people's future life. For example, because of children's great interest in computer games it's difficult to form children's understanding of the importance and uniqueness of human life, as characters of many computer games may have extra lives. So,



many Ukrainian children often do not appreciate human life and they may act as their favourite computer game character. That causes a low level of moral and spiritual culture of Ukrainian children, their unwillingness and inability to develop themselves. In such situation families' activities aimed at formation of high moral, spiritual person of families become very significant, as children's education starts with their families, and it is a family that becomes the main centre of personality's formation, and religious education facilitates it greatly.

Some modern scientists have investigated different aspects of the problem with moral, spiritual and religious education in Ukrainian families. For example, G. Svyatnenko, L. Volynets, Ye. Lutsenko (2000) [1] have revealed the specific features of relationships between Ukrainian children and their parents. A. Bogush (2013) [2] has studied the peculiarities of modern Ukrainian families, their importance in children's development. The scientist said that 'a child is not born moral or immoral, he/she becomes so according to the environment and conditions he/she lives in and education he/she gets in family.' [2, p.2]; that's why it is a family that should become a centre of love, esteem and spirituality. I. Zagarnitska (2009) [3] and O. Komyakova (2006) [4] have studied the influence of modern world on children and families. T. Kravchenko (2007) [5], L. Olhovich (2007) [6] and D. Feldstein (1998) [7] have investigated the peculiarities of family communication and its influence on children's socialization. All these and other scientists emphasized that the low level of moral and spiritual culture might be caused by lack of religious education in Ukrainian families. According to this, we aimed at detailed investigation of modern state and peculiarities of religious education in Ukrainian families.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data collection

For this study we have used such methods of the research as theoretic (analysis and synthesis of scientific and educational literature for comparison, correlation of different views on the problem which is being investigated), empirical (children and parents' survey, talks, observation, written submissions (in a variety of forms), questionnaire).

2.2 Analysis of data

The first data analysed were the parents' questionnaires. According to the responses, parents (81%) have identified the necessity of religious education in families, but noticed that they don't pay much attention to it because they usually do not have enough free time to do it (as they spend much time at works and doing household activities). Only 16% of parents have told that they sometimes read and discuss religious literature with their children. Having had to range the topics which parents usually have to discuss in families, parents put religious topics on middle position (the first three positions were taken by the following topics: health, day routine, children's success at school). It is necessary to note that three of the families (10%) said that it is not important to form moral and spiritual culture, noting that people without moral culture would be more successful in business.

Besides, we have asked families to range human values which are (in their opinion) very important for person's life and should be formed in families (the participants had to choose among 12 values given in the questionnaire). The results have shown that family, health and fairness are the most significant values for Ukrainian children and their parents (77%). However, 29% of the participants have showed that such values as honesty and modesty are not important in human life at all. That indicates lack of understanding of certain human values in both parents and children and families' insufficient work at forming children's spirituality.

Children and parents' surveys, written submissions and talks have shown that religious education is not very popular with Ukrainian families. That can be proved by the fact that there are very few religious books at Ukrainian homes and religious holidays are considered to be just ordinary holidays to have good time. Some children (26%) even couldn't tell the origin and traditions of certain religious holidays (Easter, Trinity). Only 20% of families have told that they have certain family traditions to celebrate religious holidays and they regularly tell their children religious stories.

It should be noted that in Ukraine there are very few children's religious books at all and there are very few religious books for children (usually from 2 to 10) in assortment of books in publishing houses.

It's interesting to emphasize that according to the results of our investigation children from families where parents do not pay much attention to religious education (19%) have shown lower level of moral culture than children from the



families where parents read and discuss religious stories and have their certain traditions to celebrate religious holidays. That proved a direct relationship between religious education in families and the level of children's culture and showed that parents' low cultural and spiritual level often causes their children's low level of culture. Moreover, parents have identified that state educational system does not take much notice of this problem too as there is not such a subject in Ukrainian schools as Religious Education. So, children's religious education wholly depends on families' education. Besides, 42% of the families considered it necessary to have Religious Education as a subject at school.

3. MAIN TEXT

3.1 The problems with formation of spirituality

Thus, the results of the study helped us distinguish the problems with formation of spirituality in Ukrainian families. They are: parents' lack of attention to religious education and insufficient work in this direction; parents' inattentiveness, absence of their wish and possibilities to communicate with their children; lack of proper example (by parents) for forming children's spirituality; parents' oppression of the spiritual foundations, which aim to appear in children, through imposing stereotypes, excessive moralization, offenses, rebukes, mocks, authoritarian style of communication in families.

3.1.1 Parents' Lack of Attention to Religious Education and Insufficient Work in This Direction

The results of the analysis of children's behaviour and numerous events of children and adolescents' immoral (and sometimes even criminal) behaviour have shown that religious education hadn't become a part of their spiritual life in families.

With the help of religious education parents should impart their children: love and respectable, careful, tender and sympathetic attitude to people and all surrounding world; awareness of necessity to keep religious laws; understanding of necessity to develop person's inner world and development of the ability to carry out self-education and self-development; love of life, understanding of its value, as modern world with its virtual life and computer games negates the value of human life. The numerous TV programs (which showed the events of excessive children's aggressiveness – they beat and sometimes even killed animals and people without being aware of the results of their actions) have proved it. On asking children about the reasons which urged them to act in such a way and their awareness of future consequences, these children answered that they had not thought that their actions might cause someone's death (these children considered that an animal or a person, whom they had killed or hurt, would have another life like characters in computer games!). And even after their talks and work with adults these children did not realize what they had done, as they wholly identified themselves with their favourite characters from virtual life (games, films) and acted as the characters did.

All these and other spiritual values can be easily formed in children through religious education, as these values are presented in all religious laws, described in Bible. They form children's attitude to certain situations and practical demeanour for action. Thus, religious education helps to form person's correct attitude to life, individual high spiritual level.

It is necessary to point out that in families where religious education plays a significant role and parents bring up their children in love and mutual understanding, teach them to love and esteem the surrounding world, children have high level of spirituality, and they are honest and sincere. There are fewer children and adolescents- delinquents in such families, because, if religion really enters children's hearts, it becomes the basis of all their actions, their inner core.

Besides, religious education is particularly important in period of childhood, as children's development in early years and the peculiarities of their cognition of the world influence all their further life



and spiritual growth. That is why it is very necessary and important for parents to acquaint their children with religious laws in childhood, to form their constant wish, ability and awareness of the necessity to act according to religious laws. So, the formation of spirituality on the basis of religious values means development of moral rules, which are realized by a person in the form of norms, principles, ideals, concepts, etc., and adhering to them.

3.1.2 Parents' inattentiveness, absence of their wish and possibilities to communicate with their children

It is connected with low level of parent's pedagogical culture and social-economical problems in society (many parents have to work a lot to ensure necessary existence of their children, and after it they do not have time and even physical strength to communicate and educate their children).

That causes the situation when a family is not the main factor of person's development any longer, and children (and formation of their morality) find themselves under the influence of other factors (for example, social environment, mass media etc.) which, unfortunately, seldom care for children's spiritual development. This negative influence is carried through distortion and negative cover of information that is necessary for children, providing them with information of low quality and content, developing the topics for which children are not ready mentally yet. All these factors lead to negative influence on children's intellectual and emotional-sensual sphere and their spiritual development.

3.1.3 Lack of proper example (by parents) for forming children's spirituality

We can talk a lot about low spiritual level of people as a factor of formation of unspiritual children, but we are sure that since a family is a part of society we should start the formation of spiritual person from families. These are parents who form the basis of their children's spirituality by means of talks, correct behaviour and attitude to people.

Parents who remain indifferent to small (as they think) tricks of their children (torturing animals, offending ill and old people, disrespect for other people) will absolutely see in future that their children would treat them the same. Big evil starts from small pranks which may offend other people. The great Ukrainian pedagogue V. Syhomlynskiy (1976) analyzed private affairs of some hundreds of juvenile delinquents and concluded that in families where parents were indifferent to moral education of their children, where there was a difficult atmosphere of inspirituality, problem children would certainly grow up [8].

3.1.4 Parents' oppression of the spiritual foundations, which aim to appear in children, through imposing stereotypes, excessive moralization, offenses, rebukes, mocks, authoritarian style of communication in families

That is caused, first of all, by lack of parents' understanding the natural, divine essence of children, lack of elementary pedagogical knowledge (not always parents can notice what really happens in child's soul).

4. CONCLUSION

So, psychological conditions of children's spiritual growth, their self-realization in society, the development of their spiritual potential are formed in family. In order to enable children's getting the high level of self-sufficiency and spiritual maturity, it is necessary for parents to carry out purposeful and well-considered work with their children from early years. Religious education is very important in this process, as it is religion that lays the foundations of person's spirituality.



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