

RELIGIOUS VALUES AND STUDENT POPULATION

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Abstract. Values – as universal and relatively lasting orientations speak about objectives that individuals or groups deem appropriate and whose achievement they are inclined to. Values may refer to the sensible goals of individual life, but also to the more universal social values and objectives that individuals consider appropriate and which achievement they are endorsing. An important determinant of the term "value" refers to the idea of the worthy, which means that it is not enough to know what an individual is inclined to, but also whether he deems appropriate and worthy whatever it is he is inclined towards. Acquired values give shape to a way of life and indicate to the means of meeting the needs.

Values are not simply a matter of "taste" or an absolutely autonomous choice of an individual, they are rather socially determined; Certain values are variable, characteristic of certain historical epochs, but there are values that are characteristic of the society and culture of all times and therefore have the character of permanent or universal. By passing on the chosen value systems to each new generation, the societies strive to provide an unobstructed process of the entire social and cultural self-reproduction. The values are acquired during social learning under the influence of various socialization agents. The presence of a certain value system and its intensity within a given time interval, speak of the spirit of that time, and the comparative findings obtained at different times make it possible to determine the influence the current social circumstances have on the formation and changing of values. Knowing to what extent religious values influence the formation of value systems of the teacher education faculties' students is very important because they are the ones that will in the quick change of the generations take part in achieving one of the most important tasks of institutionalized education – molding of an *appropriate* personality of new generations. An empirical research was conducted on the so-called random sample of central Serbia's teacher education faculties student population in aim of establishing whether religious values are and if so, to what extent part of the reference value framework of future teachers.

The student population is exposed to various factors that influence the formation of their value systems and behavioral patterns. The behavioral patterns acquired through the process of primary socialization within the family, in which the influence of family environment is decisive in their

formation, are in subsequent phases of socialization exposed to the influence of other factors, such as peers, mass culture, the media, as well as religion. Exposed to this conglomerate of influences, individuals and various groups, such as and including the students, chose their lifestyle and form their behavioral patterns. Affinity and antagonism towards someone or something are defined by the *values* that are embedded in those patterns.

The intention of this research is to determine the existence of religious values in one part of the students of the Teacher Education Faculties.

As a research technique a descriptive and analytical method and survey was used in this research. The research included the second-year students of the Teacher Education Faculties in central Serbia (149 students).

The main findings of the research have shown the following: (a) that it is possible to speak of unequal acceptance of different religious values within the surveyed student population; (b) that a group of religious rules, which regulates relationships among people in the social community, is deeply respected within the surveyed population, while the regulatory influence of the rules that directly relate to their relationship to divine authority are smaller accepted from a significantly smaller number of students.

Keywords: Values, Religion, student population, socialization, religious behaviour

Introduction

Values and value orientations are often used as synonyms, although there have been attempts to segregate these two terms. Thus, value orientations are defined as general principles of behavior and action in relation to certain goals whose achievement is sought, while values are considered to mean accepted and desirable ideas regarding social relations whose achievement is sought (Rot and Havelka, 1973). Kuzmanović (1995) considers that values imply the more articulated and more defined concept of appropriate, and value orientations a broader, less articulated belief system. In addition to the desirability, the characteristics of the values are relative stability, generality, hierarchical organization and goal orientation (Pantić, 1981). The values are often the subject of consideration and research because of their contribution to the interpretation and understanding of phenomena, as well as the prognostic power that arises from their motivational foundation and relative stability (Pantić, 1995). In addition to being able to explain and predict behavior, it gives an insight into the value orientations of young people, contributing to the expansion of knowledge about the value formation mechanisms and the effects of socialization (Joksimović and Đerić, 2007) which can be of help to the creators of educational policy in more adequate ascertainment of educational goals and their more successful

achievement (Joksimović, Maksić, 2006). Different approaches and evaluation methods are used in the values and value orientations research, and one of the ways is to put the values into use through the description of individual lifestyles. Based on the expressed relation to a certain lifestyle (its practice, desirability and preference), the conclusions are drawn about the value orientations under the assumption that they are at the basis of a certain lifestyle. This approach is usually used to research the values of personal life, among the more common ones, based on the Spranger's six ideals or value orientations (Allport, 1969).

Knowing the values of the young is important both from the aspect of the individual and from the aspect of society because they have a driving role in the individual's relation to their own environment (Sekulić, 2011). Changes in Serbian society that have been lasting for three decades have led to numerous transformations in all its dimensions, including religion: the transition has led to its revitalization (Blagojević, 1995; Trifunović, 1999).

Methodology

The aim of the research is to determine the existence of religious values among students of Teacher Education Faculties. The research included second year students of the Teacher Education Faculties in central Serbia: a total of 149. A descriptive-analytical method and survey were used as a research technique. The survey questionnaire contained questions that examined (a) the social matrix of the student family backgrounds, (b) student attitudes about religious values, churches, nations, and (c) their religious behavior.

The basic assumption of the research is that the students, future teachers, are not inclined towards religious values.

Results and Discussion

The examined students came from a homogenously Christian Orthodox environment and positively denominationally identified themselves: 98,7% of the respondents are of the Christian Orthodox denomination. Whether the affiliation to the given denomination equates to the acceptance of religious values in everyday life, is somewhat revealed by the results of the research.

The students were asked to categorize various life achievements on the scale from *Very Important* to *Not important* (Table 1).

Table 1 - Students attitudes towards various life achievements

Types of achievement	Very important		Important		Moderately important		Not important	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. To acquire an influential position	14	9,4	23	15,4	65	43,6	41	27,5
2. To have a lot of money	15	10,1	48	32,2	63	42,3	20	13,4
3. To comprehensively develop my personality	121	81,2	25	16,8	2	1,3	0	0,0
4. To be more active in the church	10	6,7	52	34,9	62	41,6	20	13,4
5. To show love to other people	74	49,7	59	39,6	13	8,7	0	0,0
6. To nurture my belief in god	40	26,8	67	45,0	33	22,1	6	4,0
7. To be famous and popular	6	4,0	17	11,4	44	29,5	79	53,0
8. To be honourable	105	70,5	38	25,5	3	2,0	0	0,0
9. To have good physical health	124	83,2	19	12,8	4	2,7	0	0,0
10. To nurture close friendships	108	72,5	32	21,5	7	4,7	0	0,0
11. To have a spouse and children	118	79,2	23	15,4	7	4,7	0	0,0
12. To have a comfortable life	54	36,2	58	38,9	24	16,1	9	6,0
13. To positively influence the lives of other people	77	51,7	55	36,9	14	9,4	1	0,7

Achievements marked with numbers **9, 3, 11, 10** and **8**, classified according to the decreasing importance, are most desirable for the highest percentage of students: good physical health is very important for 83, 2% of students; a *comprehensively developed personality* is very important for 81, 2% of students; *spouse and children* are very important for 79, 2% of respondents; *close friendships* are very important for 72,5% of respondents; *Being honorable* is very important for 70,5% of students.

Following are the achievements marked with numbers **13** and **5** which a small percentage of respondents think are very important: 51%, a *positive impact on the lives of other people* is important to 7% of students; Showing *love to other people* is very important for 49.7% of respondents.

Significantly smaller percentage of students prefers *comfortable life* (12) that is very important for 36,2% of students. While the *belief in God* (6) is very important of 26,8% of the students.

The achievement marked with numbers 2, 1, 4 and 7 are important to the smallest number of students. The *money* is very important for 10,1% of the respondents; *Influential position* is very important for 9,4% of students, *church activities* represents a very important value for 6,7% of students, *Fame and popularity* is very important to only 4,0% of respondents.

The displayed ranking of various *achievements* or values shows that the highest percentage of evaluated students chose, as the most important, the one we may in free interpretation call *wholesome living capital: health, comprehensive personality, family, friendship, honor*.

The positive influence on other people (51,7%) and *Showing love to other people* (49,7%) are the achievements that a great part of the evaluated population considered very important. They represent the elements of emphasized philanthropy lifestyle. Nurturing love towards another, towards the nearest, stems from the fundamental Christian teaching – from the one of the two greatest commandments of God: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. However, only 6-7% of respondents emphasizes that it is important to *be more active in the church* which shows that those values that convey ecclesiasticism have not been embedded within the student population.

The obtained results show that the values that are ranking high in the developed modern societies – *money, influential position, fame, popularity* – are not prevalent among the evaluated students.

Whether the respondents and if so to what extent, adopt the Christian rules of behaviour in their everyday life is shown in the Table 2:

Table 2 - God's commandments as rules of behavior

Commandments/Rules of behaviour	Very influential		Influential		Moderately influential		Not influential	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Frequency (F) – Percentages (%)								
1. Thou shalt not make unto thee any given images... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them.	39	26,2	60	40,3	40	26,8	10	6,7
2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.	49	32,9	57	38,3	30	20,1	12	8,1

3. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy; Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.	35	23,5	47	31,5	50	33,6	15	10,1
4. Honour thy father and thy mother.	111	74,5	32	21,5	5	3,4	0	0,0
5. Thou shalt not kill.	135	90,6	10	6,7	3	2,0	0	0,0
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery.	90	60,4	31	20,8	20	13,4	8	5,4
7. Thou shalt not steal.	117	78,5	24	16,1	6	4,0	1	0,7
8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.	107	71,8	30	20,1	10	6,7	0	0,0
9. Thou shalt not covet anything that is neighbour's.	76	51,0	45	30,2	21	14,1	6	4,0

The data show that students obey all commandments, however not to an equal extent: in the range of one-fifth of the "obedient" to almost 90% of those who have integrated certain commandments into their own code of conduct. A group of religious rules, which regulates relationships among people within the social community, is highly respected within the surveyed population, while the rules that directly relate to their relationship to divine authority have a less regulatory influence - they are accepted by a significantly smaller number of respondents. Values that give shape to the visible world, as well as social relations are more accepted to a greater extent than the values that administer relationships with the immaterial world. The rational has in this population prevailed over the transcendental. The ranking of commandments that have a *significant influence* to students everyday life are shown according to the decreasing order of importance: 1) *Thou shalt not kill* (90,6%); 2) *Thou shalt not steal* (78,5%); 3) *Honour thy father and thy mother* (74, 5%); 4) *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour* (71,8%); 5) *Thou shalt not commit adultery* (60,4%); 6) *Thou shalt not covet anything that is neighbour's* (51,0%); 7) *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain* (32,9%); 8) *Thou shalt not make unto thee any given images; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them.* (26,2%); 9) *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God* (23,5%).

Whether the respondents give priority to religious, national or ecclesiastical values can be seen in the Table 3.

Table 3 - Religion, nation, church

Assertion	Absolutely agree		Agree		Inexplicit		Disagree		Absolutely disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Frequency (F) – Percentages (%)										
1. Religion is an envoy of values that occupy the most profound place in the human philosophy of life	17	11,4	75	50,3	42	28,2	10	6,7	3	2,0
2. I do not understand religious teachings, but I believe that they help people become more honourable	19	12,8	74	49,7	39	26,2	12	8,1	3	2,0
3. I believe that going to church is a good indicator of national morale	22	14,8	44	29,5	34	22,8	36	24,2	11	7,4
4. I believe that religious teachings have a strongest influence on virtuous conduct and righteous life	27	18,1	58	38,9	34	22,8	24	16,1	4	2,7
5. Nation is a source of religion	12	8,1	37	24,8	64	43,0	29	19,5	5	3,4
6. Religion is a source of nation and national unity	22	14,8	53	35,6	54	36,2	15	10,1	3	2,0
7. Religion is not important for the nation.	6	4,0	10	6,7	34	22,8	68	45,6	28	18,8
8. The influence of Religion diminishes with educational progress	5	3,4	37	24,8	36	24,2	51	34,2	16	10,7
9. Belonging to the church is a foundation of a wholesome life	10	6,7	38	25,5	54	36,2	32	21,5	12	8,1
10. I love my religion because in it there exists the spirit of love	40	26,8	75	50,3	26	17,4	5	3,4	2	1,3
11. In my environment I often encounter the exploitation of religion and church for nationalistic purposes	37	24,8	63	42,3	31	20,8	11	7,4	6	4,0
12. When I encounter the term Orthodox, I feel a sense of pride and tradition	50	33,6	69	46,3	21	14,1	6	4,0	1	0,7

13. The Serbian Orthodox Church has a decisive influence on the preservation of the national identity of the Serbs	47	31,5	67	45,0	28	18,8	4	2,7	2	1,3
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The first three ranked assertions: (1) *When I encounter the term Orthodox I feel a sense of pride and tradition* is the assertion 79,9% of respondents agreed with; (2) *I love my religion because in it there exists the spirit of love* is the assertion 77,1% of respondents agreed with; (3) *The Serbian Orthodox Church has a decisive influence on the preservation of the national identity of the Serbs* is the assertion 76,5% of respondents agreed with. The first two assertions carry positive value connotations, which contain the term *orthodox* and the specific religious state of the spirit – *the spirit of love*. The strong agreement with the third assertion points to the deep roots of understanding of the importance and respect of the Serbian Orthodox Church for the Serbian state and culture. The basis of the value matrix of the evaluated students consist of religious rather than national values.

Conclusion

Data on value orientations of young people, collected in different periods of time, enable us to draw conclusions about stability or variability in their value profile, as well as about the influence social processes have on value preferences. The research has shown the following: 1) the large percentage of students accept religious values, which are important landmarks in their everyday life; 2) the religious values that influence the formation of social relations are more widespread among the students than religious values that "define" the relation to transcendental; 3) students "put" religion and church before the nation. The obtained results point to the conclusion that positive personal confessional identification is still present among young people in Serbia, which is not accompanied by the full acceptance of "what religion teaches" – a tendency that emerged in the mid-1990s. The basic assumption of research that – *students, the future teachers- are not inclined towards religious values and in their everyday life their confessional affiliation does not play a significant role* – is not confirmed.

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