Chapter 36
Integrating Community Spirituality into Religious Education: A School Educator's Role

Ausra (sr. Gabriele OSB) Vasiliauskaite

Introduction

The pluralist, interreligious and intercultural contexts of the twenty-first century-society pose challenges for Religious Education (RE). One may claim that these challenges are twofold. First, at schools, the Church cannot conduct catechesis, that is, the formation of faith, which comprises the following four elements: announcement, the creation of the faith community, liturgy and serving others (Pope John Paul II, 1979, par. 18). The second challenge is posed by the diversity that exists in classrooms, as acknowledged by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Catechesi tradendae* (1979, par. 32–34), that is, interpretations of religious language, which correlate with human and religious experiences.

This chapter attempts to address challenges that instigate changes in the well-established systems of Catholic RE from a theoretical and a practical perspective. From the theoretical perspective, it will allow perceiving community spirituality as a new RE system that uses various literature and sources. From a practical perspective, the present investigation may contribute to integrating community spirituality with RE. The importance of integration may help not only the educator but also the school culture which "can be defined as a set of common values, norms, and expectations shared by people directly or indirectly with each other and demonstrated by their specific behaviour" (Lombaerts, 2007a, p. 192). In addition, it may provide a partial answer to the challenges of RE by making difficult decisions to change the system of RE.

A. (sr. Gabriele OSB) Vasiliauskaite (✉)
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
e-mail: ausra.vasiliauskaite@vdu.lt

Research Question

When changing the method of RE, one should return "*ad fontes*", that is, to the primary source, so as to test authenticity. I am here suggesting that one should return to the friendship model presented by Jesus. This, of course, raises the question about the role of the Gospel in the intercontextual education of pupils, applying the newest perspective to future normativity. One of the most successful models, the hermeneutic-communicative model (HCM), was applied in Belgian schools by Lambert and Pollifyet (Vasiliauskaitė, 2010). On the basis of the HCM, where the educator has to be a good specialist, moderator and witness, the question whether these basic qualities are sufficient for an educator is still posed. It does seem that these three qualities of a Religious Educator arise from the concept of community spirituality (CS). Thus, this paper aims to prove the importance of integration of CS into RE and to discuss the role of a Religious Educator.

In order to reach this aim, the following objectives have been formulated: to discuss the concepts of CS and RE; to describe the role of the Gospel in RE; to prove that it is possible to integrate CS integration into RE; and to outline the role of a Religious Educator at school.

The research methodology in this chapter is based on philosophical theories. The first theory that is being taken into consideration is that of hermeneutics, that is, "the theory of historicity of human experience and linguisticality" as defined by Gadamer (2006). The theory comprises sub-theories, methods and principles. The main methods employed in this article are those of argumentation, hermeneutics and "proclaiming" from the perspective of personal testimony. The second philosophical theory used is the "theory of dialectical modelling" by Paulauskas. Though his theory, the relationship between CS and HCM has been determined and also tested through the dialectical relationship of content and form (Paulauskas, 1999). The third theory is "Dialogics". An interdisciplinary research has been used to prove the possibility of integrating CS in RE.

In this way, the role of an educator has been revealed in inter-contextual RE. The other part of the research methodology is founded on the theological and "educological" disciplines, whose help and support are detailed in this chapter. The first theological discipline is "Personalist anthropology". This principle has been used in defining the objects of CS and RE. The second is "The theology of spirituality". According to Chiara Lubich's community theology, the terms have defined both CS and its pedagogy. The third theological discipline is "Christology". The importance of the cooperation between Christ and the person (the friendship model) is demonstrated in the pedagogy of CS as well as the role that Jesus, the Logos, has in interreligious, inter-contextual and pluralist contexts. The fourth is "Eschatology", where friendship is understood as "the normativity of the future".

From "Educology", the role of an educator at school has been defined on the basis of the main principles of the pedagogy of CS. As a result of such applied and diverse theories and disciplines, this chapter makes use of multi-sided aspects, not only in

systemic theology, but also in the educological and philosophical literature, and the resources herein.

Research Methods

The analysis of argumentation (Rienecker & Jørgensen, 2003) was applied in discussing the possibility of integrating CS into RE on the basis of HCM. In addition, by applying the method of argumentation, the terms used in the present paper have been grounded philosophically and theologically. The structural and systemic analysis allowed distinguishing and describing the elements of CS and the aspects of the role of a Religious Educator at school. Employing the hermeneutical method, the elements of CS and the conceptualisation of RE and the HCM have been analysed. This revealed the core philosophical principles of the HCM and allowed perceiving the theological features of the model itself. Using the recontextualisation method, the HCM has been analysed in the context of CS. The theoretical comparative analysis has been applied in the comparison of the RE model, the HCM, and the elements of CS.

In order to achieve theoretical synthesis, the generalization method has been employed in order to generalize the educological and theological literature so as to achieve the aim of the paper.

The Concepts of Community Spirituality and Hermeneutics of Religious Education

The Second Vatican Council (1965a, *Nostra Aetate*, par. 1–5) emphasized the ideal of a Church as a community, the aim of which is a dialogue not only with Christian churches, but also with other religions and even with non-believers. In her Focolare Movement (in Italian, Focolare is a fireplace, a family) and teachings, Lubich (2011) forms the "basis of the Church reborn in the light of the Second Vatican Council and open for every dialogue" (p. 101). This unity culture is born based on the line of the Holy Scripture "*ut omnes unum sint*", ("they may all be one") (Jn 17:21) and on the concept of dialogue, as one of the main ways leading to the unity of individuals, communities, groups, religions, and CS. This is generalized by John Paul II who claims that

> Community Spirituality first refers to the view of our heart to the mystery of the Trinity in us, the light of which is reflected in the faces of our brothers and sisters. Moreover, Community Spirituality also refers to the ability to feel a deep unity of the mysterious Body and treat one's brother in faith as 'his/her own part.' Several conclusions can be made on the basis of this principle related to feelings and behaviour: to share the joys and suffering of brothers and sisters; to feel their deep desires and take care of their needs; and to suggest an authentic and deep friendship. Community Spirituality also refers to the ability to see the positive things

in others, accepting and cherishing this as God's gift; finally, this means providing space for a brother or a sister, carrying each other's burdens. Without this spiritual unity, external means will have little use. (Congregation for Consecrated Life Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2002, par. 29)

From these descriptions, one may distinguish the elements of CS (Lubich, 2008), which help to discuss the conception of CS itself. The first element is "love testimony" which was emphasized by Pope Benedict XVI (2011, par. 14), when he announced the Year of Faith in 2012. According to Apostle Paul, love is the strongest and the most important virtue (1 Cor 13:13). Love is the basis for CS because Jesus Christ is God's love which became flesh (Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, par. 12–15) and has remained present in the Blessed Sacrament. It is only then that we can see the face of the Trinitarian God in another person. In this way, Love receives the expression of the divine quality of Love. "Each person who loves, acts stimulated by grace" (Lubich, 1997, p. 83). Grace allows opening up to the freedom of the spirit, while the freedom of the spirit and the testimony of the Gospel are two major requirements for a "dialogue" because community is sharing the gift (Congregation for Consecrated Life Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2002, par. 42), which is the second element of CS. The Second Vatican Council (1965b, *Ad Gentes*, par. 11) encouraged this dialogue. According to Lubich (1997), the Second Vatican Council "suggests adapting the announcement of the Word of God to the customs, thinking, and culture of various nations, to encourage a new theological attitude, and to avoid syncretism and false narrowness" (p. 68). This cannot be implemented without "unity and the creation of unity culture", which is the third element of CS. What is even more necessary is a CS that destroys individualism and encourages "commonality". The latter is the fourth element of CS, since a person tends to create commonality and form communities (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, par. 1877–1880, 1890–1891). It can be, therefore, concluded that CS is the ability to seek unity among individuals through Love in all life spheres, including the school, not being fearful of dialogue with the Other and creating commonality. However, can CS manifest itself in RE, or be integrated with RE? In order to do so it is first necessary to define RE and to find common indicators.

RE is here being defined as the conveyance of perception, by a person who is informed and has a religious competence, to others about moral and religious problems, comprising both the individual and the collective sphere of life where all community is educated (Vasiliauskaitė, 2010, p. 7).

From this perspective, the educator has to live according to God's Word found in the Gospel; more precisely s/he has to communicate with the living God. Communication rather than age is the key factor as "religious education, the main mission of the Church, has an important task, i.e., to proclaim and to witness God's Word" (Stumbra, 2012, p. 114). Thus, the main principle of RE throughout the history of its development has become the dialogicity of Jesus, which refers to the attempt to communicate with the Being rather than remain in the solo monologue. This is confirmed not only by the personal way of proclaiming the Good News, but also by the public community-based one, that is, liturgy. The basis of all this, as Psalm 117 (118) indicates, is "the corner-stone" that Jesus revealed through the Gospels

(Vasiliauskaitė, 2014). Therefore, it is important to highlight the Biblical perspective of the key principles of RE, as a common indicator of "Community Spirituality" and "Religious Education", which will describe the integration of CS into RE, using one of the most successful models of RE in the twenty-first century, that is, the HCM, and describing the role of a school educator.

A Biblical Perspective: The Role of the Gospel

The Bible is not a simple text even though this "Word" is addressed to everyone. Only when the Word becomes alive it is in dialogue. One is invited to dialogue with the Word and thus, the revealed Word becomes flesh. This is the beginning of the Revelation as a dialogue, where "the creation 'logos', the 'logos' in the person, and the real and eternal 'Logos', the Son, who became the person, meet each other" (Pope Benedict XVI, 2012, p. 38). Jesus caused an eschatological tension through this announcement: "already" and "not yet". The Kingdom of God is already here, but not yet fully. Jesus invites us to friendship. This is a friendship is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who is "already" and "not yet" (Cantalamessa, 2010, p. 223). For this reason, the Word of God is the basis of the fulfilment of the promise (Second Vatican Council, 1965c, *Dei verbum*, par. 3–21). It is said that the Spirit is "already" because the promise is already partly fulfilled now, and not yet because we face the eschatological waiting. It is not without reason that the Council Fathers emphasized that "to carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (Second Vatican Council, 1965d, *Gaudium et spes*, par. 4). In the four Gospels, the concept of "the signs of time" is treated very differently. There is a transfer from John's Word about "the One Who Comes" to the Word itself, which came and has become "the sign of time" forever. This shows that in today's world, one needs to hear, recognize, explain, and evaluate various voices of the present time on the basis of the Light of God's Word so that the revealed Truth could be more clearly visible, understandable, and revealed more properly (Second Vatican Council, 1965a, b, c, d, *Gaudium et spes*, par. 44). In order to understand the signs of the times, the Church needs to open up and begin a dialogue with the world (Elsbernd & Bieringer, 2010). The Church has to protect the existing eschatological tension. The treatment of Jesus as the main "sign of the time" and the waiting for His second coming may and does create an eschatological perspective. From this perspective, one may suggest other terms, which not only comprise the main theological dimensions discussed above and the hermeneutical approach but also leave space for new directions. Such terms include commonality, the Spirit, Hope, "the future, alternative world, the invasion, the vision—the Word vision", ethical, practical development, "Revelation and human sinfulness", and rationality and dialogue. These dimensions and the hermeneutical approach allow an understanding of the content of the normative future, which is not a methodology (Elsbernd & Bieringer, 2010). Methodology—"theoretical concepts/models and assumptions that help to understand the problem under study and

design a research" (Teresevičienė et al., 2005, p. 38). Since the normative future is a term, it is based on the theory of language metaphors and expressions of symbols (Ricoeur, 2000).

Thus, according to Vasiliauskaitė (2014), the basis of this new and open perspective is the friendship model. Therefore, the Bible, the Word, cannot be an obstacle in current RE in schools. On the contrary, it should assist the pupil to meet God (that is., to open up in communication). Furthermore, the friendship model and the perspective of the "normative future" becomes the basis of the HCM because in the contemporary multicultural European context, it is very difficult to arouse the interest of the person in the Bible from the historical perspective (Pollefeyt & Bieringer, 2010). To reveal why the Word has been chosen as the basis of the HCM should be discussed to reveal the integration of CS into this model disclosing the change in the school educator's role.

The Possibility of the Integration of Community Spirituality into Religious Education

In the Biblical perspective, which is a common indicator of CS and RE, the possibility of integration is apparent. In order to show the aspects of this possibility, a pedagogical model of RE could help in describing this. Thus, the concept of HCM that extends the correlation model in teaching religion at a secondary school, has been chosen. This model was developed at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven on the basis of a scientific project of the Academic Institute for Teacher Education in Religion (Lombaerts & Pollefeyt, 2004b). The aspects of the integration of the CS are highlighted. When discussing the concept of the HCM in various contexts, including the intercontextual, interreligious and pluralist.

Up until recently, Europe was based on Christian values but since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Western Europe has been moving along a different path. According to Profs. Lombaert and Pollefeyt (2004a), while previously the central place was occupied by religious institutions, it is now the person and his/her context that occupies centre stage. In such a situation, the communication style is also different. In schools, people of various religions and cultures learn together and, the culture of unity is fostered. The main aspiration here as well as in CS is unity. The old mechanical way of transmitting information based on memory is no longer suitable or valid (Tha Ling Sum, 2012a, b). Therefore, in focusing on transmitting information and knowledge, teachers do not touch their pupils' hearts. Pupils do not perceive the Christian faith because there is no quality of Love, first emphasized by CS. The connection between RE and hermeneutics becomes particularly important as it aims at the conversion of the heart. Faith and human experience should go together and this merging can only be achieved through dialogue. In a contemporary pluralist context, it is most suitable to perceive religion as typical of religious cultures or nations. A new discipline, the theology of dialogue, has emerged, which is also developed

by CS. The source of its development is interreligious dialogue, a hermeneutical key is the assumption of different religious traditions and the role of an educator is to open an interreligious dialogue. Because of this new point of view, a Religious Educator is perceived as "a hermeneut, i.e., a witness, a specialist, and a moderator" (Pollefeyt, 2008, p. 14) based on the concept of CS. A witness endeavours to live the living Word so as to be recognized not only by pupils but also by other people. A Religious Educator as a specialist is perceived as a person who has to search for and read the signs of the times (Second Vatican Council, 1965d, *Gaudium et spes*, par. 4); to be able to open the windows (it. "aggiornamento") to contemporary reality, that is, to interrupt the dialogue with the Word. For this, a modern dialogue is necessary: the search for a new way rather than the provision of the Catechism. Therefore, for instance, to moderate, a group of children in class means to allow the Word to operate. Thus one more aspect, communication, is involved, which helps to develop dialogue. Communication encourages commonality, which is one more element of CS. "Communication marked by the art of interpretation is a special sign of human quality" (Lombaerts and Pollefeyt, 2004b, p. VI). The quality may be understood as the ABC of human attempts for searching, which helps perceiving oneself. Naturally, this communication may be interpreted ambiguously because it may be both external and internal. The indicator of external communication is not closeness, that is, there cannot be exclusion among children of different cultures and religions. They are witnesses to each other and they recognize the importance and uniqueness of their own religion. Having in mind the interreligious and pluralist context, it should be noted that the participant in this dialogue is not only the Religious Educator who is a hermeneut but also the Other. This external openness presupposes the openness of internal communication. With the emphasis on individuality as an expression of human dignity, without damaging his/her personality, the person opens up to the living Word and accepts It, while the Word draws the person into the dialogue.

The analysis of the two most important aspects of the HCM, hermeneutics and communication, which comprise four main elements of CS, lead to the conclusion that an absolutely new perspective of RE is necessary when RE becomes hermeneutic action and hermeneutics—the main paradigm of RE (Lombaerts and Pollefeyt, 2004a). In this HCM, which is done through a Catholic perspective, community spirituality becomes a hermeneutic key. Thus, at school where Catholic RE is conducted, not only the educator's role changes, but also the HCM content provides a new direction. This could be referred to as the pedagogy of community spirituality or the community pedagogy. The community pedagogics is a new paradigm which presupposes and requires one to live in relation with others when the quality of love is entrenched in the highest values because it is open to another, higher, non-deducted and constant exchange among professors, professors and students, and students (Lubich, 2012).

The Role of a Religious Educator at School

Community spirituality should first arise from the spirituality of family love, which arises from the spirituality of the divine community of the Trinity (Pope Francis, 2016, par. 313–314).

In this context, the role of a Religious Educator can be understood as that of being a good witness, a specialist and a moderator. The pedagogy of CS involves all these roles while at the same time, within the school context, broadens. The role of a Religious Educator may be discussed from three different perspectives. The first perspective is the position of the Religious Educator himself/herself: life in CS according to the example of an educational family. At the end of the nineteenth century, Paolina Kergonard (as cited in Cardini, 2012) called a school in France "a mother-like school". "A school" because it is related to the consistency and integrity of an educational programme, which requires the professional knowledge of the educator; "mother-like"—because of a natural and cosy way of learning". Similarly, Chiara Lubich attempts to liken the school to a large family where a community is created and community-based and educational relationship dominate. According to Chiara Lubich, dialogue provides the consistent methodology of making people as one (as cited in Gasparini, 2012). If this is not the case and if the person is not perceived as a gift, it is impossible to talk about any dialogue at school. Therefore, this relationship is possible at school only when listening. Thus, a Religious Educator should be a good and attentive "listener". When listening and creating the relationship of community, Love becomes the main method and the Person, a Gift (Zanghí, 2012). In such a case, the role of a Religious Educator is to help young persons to recognize and to open up to the Space of love (de Beni, 2012). The second perspective reveals the role of a Religious Educator very clearly: his/her reciprocity, the expression of which is approaching the other, taking a step to meet the other, seeking for a dialogue, and focusing on community pedagogics.

Avogadri (2012) maintains that according to Chiara Lubich, teaching is not static. Moreover, it is life and face-to-face talking, responding to life's needs and the questions posed. Each pupil is encouraged by a Religious Educator who focuses more on the others and has already found the Master of his/her heart. This discovery becomes the main principle of hermeneutics and life. Thus, from Rosmini to the Catholic pedagogy of the 20th century, this is one of the main topics of pedagogical personalism. It is in principle renewed by Chiara Lubich, providing a hermeneutical dimension of Christ as the Truth and the transcendental dimension 'among,' which we started to define and which was found by Plato in unity among people and in interpersonality, using a contemporary term (Avogadri, 2012). Therefore, each Religious Educator has to develop himself/herself, encouraging the pupils' trust in him/her.

The third perspective is the educator's input to pupils on the basis of the pedagogy of CS. One of the most important issues is positive education of young people. On the basis of this education, the Religious Educator uses six main virtues distinguished by Peterson and Seligman (as cited in Rijavec, 2012): Wisdom and knowledge, Determination, Humanness, Justice, Moderation, and Transcendency.

Each of these virtues has cognitive strengths. The virtue of Wisdom and knowledge is the cognitive strength comprised of gaining and applying knowledge—a religious educator encourages creativity in discovering new ways of action, through curiosity by showing interest in new topics and experiences; through openness to think and evaluate from various perspectives; through love for education to gain new skills and knowledge, and through a broad perspective to be able to advise. The second virtue, Determination, an emotional strength and will to reach the aim despite internal and external difficulties is manifested through authenticity and honesty to say the truth; to present yourself as you are; through courage not to retreat when facing dangers, challenges, difficulties, or pain; through persistency to finish the task, and through vitality to view life with joy. These virtues are also transferred to the pupils, and are the outcomes of a religious educator. The third virtue, Humanness, refers to inter-personal strengths such as caring and friendliness towards others and is developed through politeness and generosity. The fourth virtue, Justice, is the basis of a healthy life lived in society and is developed through equality and honesty, that is, treating all people equally under the principles of fairness and non-exploitation, and through leadership. The fifth virtue, Moderation, provides strength to suppress outrageous behaviour by developing forgiveness and the ability to forgive those who mistreat us; developing modesty; letting our achievements speak for us; developing calmness and cautious decision making; avoidance of future regrets and of unnecessary danger, through self-control, of one's feelings and behaviour. The sixth virtue, Transcendency, encourages the strengths in relating with the world and provides meaning to life; it is developed through respect of beauty and mastery: to recognize and respect beauty, mastery, and skills in various spheres of life.

Thus, these three perspectives clearly reveal the usefulness and importance of the integration of CS into RE in order to fully reveal the role of an educator at school.

Conclusions

CS enables the cultures of love and unity, dialogue, and commonality functioning in various spheres of life, including educational institutions. RE refers to the mutual learning of faith on the basis of the main principle of RE, that is, the dialogicity of Jesus. The Biblical perspective is a common indicator of "Community Spirituality" and "Religious Education", through which the integration of CS into RE is possible. The basis of the HCM is formed by the friendship model expressed in the Gospel and the perspective of "normative future". Because of the integration of CS into RE, the HCM forms a new hermeneutical key, that is, CS. In the context of a Catholic school, the content of the HCM acquires a new direction, that is, the pedagogy of CS or community pedagogy. The role of a Religious Educator is formed by three different perspectives. The first is the position of the religious educator himself/herself: life in CS according to the example of an educational family. The second is his/her reciprocity, which is, approaching the other, taking a step to meet the other, seeking a dialogue, and focusing on community pedagogics. The third is the educator's input

to pupils on the basis of the pedagogy of CS. One of the most important outcomes is the positive education of young people. In conclusion, these perspectives reveal the usefulness and importance of the integration of CS into RE in order to fully reveal the role of an educator at school.

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Dr. Ausra (sr. Gabriele, OSB) Vasiliauskaite holds a Ph.D. in humanities (theology) and lectures at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at VMU, Lituania.