

## EDUCATION FOR DESIRABLE BEHAVIOURS AND SHAPING THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHARACTER IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIAN VALUES

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### Abstract

*This paper proposes a reflection exercise on how parents, school teachers and religion teachers might seek to promote the moral values suggested by the oldest moral code of the world - the biblical Decalogue. It notes and argues for the need of complementing the school-type desirability education with religious and social desirability, so that family, school and church should act convergently in the process of shaping the moral profile of young people and of developing their attachment to the fundamental moral values of humanity.*

**Key words:** desirable behaviour, education for values, family education, religious education, school education

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### The concept of desirable behaviour

The concept of desirability can sometimes create certain ambiguities. From a semantical point of view, it is natural to consider, intuitively, that something is “desirable” when it meets certain expectations. In this regard, desirable is something that is desired, this being, in fact, the meaning of the term that comes from the French “désirable”. A very well-known online dictionary of psychology (*Psychology Dictionary* - World’s Most Comprehensive Online Psychology Dictionary) defines social desirability as “the inclination people feel to present themselves in a positive way to the community”. Such an approach starts from the individual and is directed to the community. There is also the community perspective that starts from the individual. From this

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point of view, behaviourpedia defines desirable behaviour as “the description of behaviours towards which the (educational, *our note*) actions are intended to be directed for the replacement of (previous, *our note*) behaviours or that aim at increasing the adaptive repertoire of an individual or a group”.

An important issue when considering the concept is represented by the existence of several criteria for assessing the degree of desirability of various manifestations: desirable behaviours for maintaining one’s body health, for complying with the legislation in force, for the good neighbourly relations between people.... etc. In this sense, it appears to be significant that, when analysing certain conditions and social events, one should determine the extent to which they are closer or farther from their specific desirability. It is also to be noted – on the other hand – that, in general, the concept of desirable behaviour is used in relation to a referential, so when we analyse its circumstantial meanings, the following questions occur naturally: “Something is desirable in relation to WHAT?” or “Something is desirable in relation to WHOM?” That is why, in the context of this paper, we will use the concept of *desirable behaviour* both in relation to Christian, traditional values, and in relation to the current global social values.

Accordingly, if we ask the question “In relation to whom?”, the answer we may tend to formulate is the following: we are concerned about the individual’s desirable behaviour in relation to him/herself, as well as in relation to the others around him/her. We believe that, by complementing these meanings, but especially by complementing the social actions that are subsequent to the social exercise suggested by these reflections, this could result in the settlement of balance in the individual’s inner life, as well as in the human being’s relationships with its peers. Given – on the other hand – our express interest to identify the task undertaken by education within the family, school and church for achieving a certain social desirability, we also approach the concept of educational desirability. From this point of view, we will consider the meaning given to this concept by the Praxiological Dictionary of Pedagogy (Bocoș, 2016, pages 319-320), according to which “educational desirability designates a type of compliance with specific rules and regulations of the education system, related to exerting a positive influence on the learners, it being in a direct relationship with social desirability”.

Considering education from all these perspectives, we would like to focus on the idea that, making use of all social mechanisms possible, contemporary society needs to provide young people with moral values which are of a perennial nature and which will never lose validity precisely because they are fundamental for the good coexistence of people. The moral values we refer to are the Christian values which are summarized in the well-known biblical Decalogue.

## **Religious education and desirable behaviours**

The Holy Scripture includes several biblical episodes which reveal the core of Christian values. At the foundation of the Christian's moral life lie the 10 Commandments of the Old Testament, the first written law and the highest moral law of all time given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20, pp. 1-17). The Orthodox doctrine teaches that one must "keep the Commandments" (Matthew 19, 17) throughout one's life, i.e. one must comply with them in order to acquire deliverance. The moral law of the Old Testament was completed in the New Testament by Jesus Christ Himself who "fulfilled the Law" during the Sermon on the Mount when He unveiled the Beatitudes to the people.

For centuries in a row, the 10 Commandments were fundamental moral guidelines that have led humanity to this day, with a capacity of entering into the individual and collective consciousness that the law – since the moment it was first invented – has never had. The Christian Decalogue was not imposed, but was committed to! This explains the extraordinary strength with which it established a certain unquestioned moral order in human relationships by establishing a religious desirability in complete agreement with social desirability. The loss of these moral guidelines during communism created irreparable consequences that mark us profoundly today. That is why restoring these values in the post-revolutionary period was a necessary and long overdue repair. An additional benefit was that of introducing the class of religion in the school curriculum starting from 1993.

Priest Dumitru Stăniloae (1994, p. 19) noted the special importance of religion in relation to the other school subjects: "If schools are to bring a contribution to the complete human being, a human being that is as spiritually elevated as possible, religion cannot miss from the educational materials ... it actually has to be the foremost or the most honoured subject. For none of the other materials can meet the human being's desire to rise above this bounded and not entirely satisfactory world man is living in".

The fulfilment of this aspiration is not easy to achieve because, as appreciated by Cucoș (2009, p. 44), "the first fundamental, unchallengeable and difficult mission of the Christian educator is to transmit the feeling of God's reality to the child: that is to help the child to know God and not to give the child knowledge about God". Therefore, as is natural, teaching religion is nothing like teaching the other subjects. The philosopher and pedagogue Bancila (1996, p. 97) took note of its specific nature: "to transform religion into a mere emotional sport, in a

sentimental gymnastics (...) is a mistake!”. “A lesson of religion is a spiritual experience which tends to contain and powerfully capitalize the entire soul, all its dimensions and functions, in a manner that is obvious for all forms of spiritual activity, from the subtle understanding of the lofty religious truths to the discrete or pathetic vibration of the feeling, to the strain of the will to worship or to contemplate or to feel compassion for human destiny, reaching even the involvement of the body itself, through the attitude or movement that it dictates in the act of piety or kneeling... Religion classes should be considered as royal education classes....” (idem, pp. 5-56).

It is understood that, in these circumstances, the objectives of teaching the religion class are more complex than those of the other subjects because, at some level, religion aims to achieve the spiritual growth of the human being who gets to internalize the basic truths and moral values. However, in order to see the concrete way in which this subject, religion, involves children/youth in practising truths and moral values within the school space (not the church), we suggest an exercise of reflection on certain educational activities that aim at promoting the Christian Decalogue at all levels of schooling.

**Table 1.** Pedagogical ways to promote and explain the Christian Decalogue to students

<b>Schooling level</b>	<b>Christian Decalogue learning activities outlined in preschool practices or recommended by the curricula in force</b>
Preschool education	<p data-bbox="573 1161 1219 1192">“The moral-religious and civic literacy” of children by:</p> <ul data-bbox="573 1199 1365 1434" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="573 1199 1365 1360">• initiating preschoolers into the world of moral-Christian and socio-civic values through activities of observation and description of moral/character features in relation to certain characters from fairy tales/literary fragments with moralizing effects or stories from the lives of saints;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1367 1365 1434">• involving children in the discussion of age-specific moral issues;</li> </ul>
Primary education (4 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<ul data-bbox="573 1440 1365 1879" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="573 1440 1365 1465">• exercising the rules of moral life in free or guided games etc.</li> <li data-bbox="573 1472 1365 1535">• listening to and/or learning the biblical texts concerning the 10 Commandments;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1541 1365 1604">• exercises to practise the application of some divine commandments in concrete situations of life;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1610 1365 1673">• storytelling/reading of stories that highlight the role and importance of the divine commandments in people’s lives;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1680 1365 1774">• exercises to analyse the similarities and differences between the divine commandments and the rules of behaviour in different social contexts;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1780 1365 1843">• discussing everyday situations of violation of the divine commandments;</li> <li data-bbox="573 1850 1365 1879">• role-playing: “How do I act when ...” with applications in</li> </ul>

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Secondary education (5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<p>various everyday situations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• open discussion to correlate the 10 Commandments with other biblical texts, proverbs and sayings with similar messages.</li><li>• debates on the Decalogue: “How can a child observe the commandments?, What happens if we do not observe them?, What differences are there between observance of the commandments by children and observance of the commandments by adults?”</li></ul>
Highschool education (10 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• exercises of identification of rules of behaviour in everyday life, starting from the Commandments of the Decalogue;</li><li>• presentation and discussion of case studies on everyday life behaviour manifested in agreement/disagreement with the Commandments of the Decalogue;</li><li>• making comparisons between the Commandments of the Decalogue and other rules of behaviour in different contexts of everyday life (e.g. family, friends, school, society, church)</li><li>• debates on the importance and role of Christian moral teachings;</li><li>• case study for exemplifying elements of Christian morality;</li><li>• self-assessment exercises in accordance with Christian values;</li><li>• Biblical and patristic argumentation.</li></ul>

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As can be seen, opportunities were created for pupils to correlate Christian dogmas with the realities of everyday life. Nevertheless, the professionalism with which the religion teacher understands to fulfill his/her mission of education is as important as the learning opportunities created for students.

### **Family education and desirable behaviours**

Moral education of children begins, of course, in the family. It is here that the child finds out the first things about what is good, what is bad, about how to behave in the relationships with others. At this age level moral behaviour is endorsed according to the principle of the mirror: the child does exactly what he/she sees! The child’s reaction is an imitative one.

As far as the content of moral conduct acquired within the family is concerned, we appreciate that, over time, desirable behaviour models were provided to the community (and therefore to the family!), firstly, by our Christian tradition. These behaviour-values have been passed down from generation to generation, even if in the families there have often occurred (higher or lower) deviations which, however, the community has always sanctioned. Analyzing the role of the Christian family, St. Theophan the Recluse (2011, p. 75) warned: “parents

themselves shall set an example of good living ...” because they, the children, “easily follow the examples that are given to them”; “(...) children are called to good deeds”.

In the same vein, but in our times, Koulomzin (2010, p. 144) stated that: “In order to become a good Christian the family must accept life, its values and challenges, in the spirit of Christian faith and this does not always coincide with the parents’ conventional piety. A Christian family should strive to establish relationships of love within the family and beyond its boundaries... A Christian family must live in a disciplinary framework recognized by all its members and in a hierarchy of Christian values... In a Christian family, the development of children’s intellect, talent and gifts should be stimulated and valued in the spirit of Christian understanding of the greatness of the human personality.”

We find, therefore, the preservation in time of some recommendations of a high degree of similarity to the behavior-values that fall exemplarily in what we identified earlier as social desirability! Nowadays, when the educational and formative force of religion has decreased, we notice that it is commonly spoken more about desirable behaviours than about Christian conduct, (naturally, given the contemporary religious pluralism!), though, essentially, current social desirability corresponds broadly to Christian desirability. Who could possibly reveal this to families, children and the youth?

Unfortunately, through the loss of many habits of Christian behaviour at the family level, behavioural desirability acquires a particular meaning. As a consequence, each family creates its own code of conduct according to its own traditions and values. Thus, rather than preserving our common Christian treasury of fundamental values, it is sought to create clan-like, nuclear value constructs, which – quite often! – exclude even basic moral values. From this point of view, the behaviour desirability accepted and promoted by the family may be in varying degrees of compliance or non-compliance with social desirability. There are even cases where the two projections/types of desirability are in completely opposing relations.

By effect, when the family produces and reinforces behaviour patterns different from those promoted by the school or church, the internal conflicts faced by children/young people deepen. Unfortunately, the outcome of these internal conflicts is one that proves to be undesirable, primarily in relation to the individual who, this way, loses very important value landmarks.

## **School education and desirable behaviours**

School education probably possesses the greatest impact on the formation and development of desirable behaviours, being associated, mainly, with education for values. Unlike family education, school education acts in an organized, programmatic manner. As a process, education for values comprises both a cognitive-informative component and – especially! – an affective-emotional one responsible for the individual's inner attachment to these existential landmarks. From a strategic standpoint, this involves engaging in the process of the state of consciousness because – as Albulescu says (2008, p. 120): “values, including the moral ones, are a result of the attribution by the human consciousness of certain qualities to an object or state of existence”.

Analysing critically the capacity of applying this desideratum in schools, we ascertain the preservation of certain educational practices focused on acquiring knowledge through memorization and a concern, still low, for a conscious learning that is autoconstructive on all levels: intellectual, moral ... In fact, one of the reproaches addressed to school today is that it focuses too much on memorising cognitive tasks, losing to a great extent the interest in acquiring moral values and attitudes. Even the religion class becomes sometimes a mad race to acquire abstract Christian dogmas, without making a connection with people's natural behavioural manifestations in real life situations.

By correspondence, the family also has an important mission in their children's character formation and development. Nevertheless, it cannot be criticized too much for the failures in the moral education of children simply because parents are not specialized in educational work, while teachers have professional certification for the skills they have in the field. The church either cannot be charged too much for the unprecedented proliferation of behaviours of immorality at the general level of the society – although the religion class is included in the school curriculum – for reasons that have to do with the fact that church attendance is not compulsory, and its action is fragmented and made from the pulpit.

That is why everyone's expectations are directed primarily towards the SCHOOL. Nevertheless, the real possibilities of the school to assume this major educational role are limited, primarily because of the reduced available time budget. The school time dedicated explicitly to the achievement of education for values is the one revealed at the level of the personal development activities or of the counselling and guidance activities. We shall further proceed to a brief analysis of the undergraduate curriculum from this point of view.

**Table 2.** Curricular components designed (more or less) for education for moral-civic values

<b>Schooling level</b>	<b>Curricular components with an emphasis on forming / developing moral values</b>
Preschool education	<i>Personal development</i> (5-6 activities/week-for normal schedule/10-11 activities/week-for overtime/weekly/schedule)
Primary education	<i>Personal development</i> – 1 class per week (preparatory class, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade) <i>Civic education</i> – a class per week at the 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grades <i>guidance and counseling</i> - 1 class per week (homeroom class)
Secondary education	<i>Civic culture</i> – a class per week (7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> grades) the <i>guidance and counselling</i> component does not appear in the curricula (the educational class is no longer strictly regulated; the
High-school education	form master makes himself/herself available for the students, parents, other teachers within an announced schedule, i.e. “only when needed”)

Analyzing this global curriculum configuration, we express our doubt whether in its establishment the formation and development of targeted moral values in children/students was envisaged and, especially, we express our skepticism about the intention to ensure a certain continuity in this process. As a practice, the curriculum proposals are made by specialized committees, different for each level of education. We note, on the other hand, the alarming situation at the high-school level, where the educational class has almost disappeared. The manner in which normative acts suggest solving this problem is not credible. This happens at an age level when both counselling and guidance are very important. As already known, adolescence is the period when the value options of the young and the fundamentals of moral behaviour are clarified and stabilized. At this age level, also called the age of the teen crisis, young people exhibit increased psychological vulnerability and are “at risk” of being attracted by criminal groups simply because there they find people who “pay attention to them”. When they do not seem to be important for teachers, they become very important for “the gang”.

In the case of these young people there can emerge predictable conflicts between educational and (possibly) religious desirability, for which they had been previously trained, and the diverted social desirability, as shown by various possibly criminal groups. The fact of being accepted by the new membership group becomes for the young individual a motivation that is stronger than any other reasons revealed by the parents who are too busy or by the form master whose advice is sought when things get out of control. To all this we may add the following shortcoming which we will formulate as a question: *Is the form master satisfactorily prepared for an activity such as that of educational counselling?*

### **Complementing school-type educational desirability with religious and social desirability**

Any individual concerned about the moral crisis we face in contemporary society reflects, of course, on ways to overcome this situation. It is amazing how, in spite of the existence of so many social levers (family, school, church), the crisis continues to deepen. The main argument used to explain the current moral crisis is that nowadays the world has become increasingly complex and the educational issues have got more and more complicated. Everything seems to be too much, much beyond control.

Against this belief, we consider that if the three educational settings outlined above have made an effort to identify a common core of moral values around which the character building of the child/young adult of tomorrow is to be achieved, ... the results could soon appear. Therefore, we shall further propose an exercise of reflection on how parents, school educators and teachers of religion might seek to promote the moral values suggested by the oldest moral code of the world - the biblical Decalogue. We chose as referential the ten religious rules to keep us in the area of values that, in one way or another, are recognized by most of the religions of the world. We will bear in mind, of course, the fact that in education, the criterion of the learner's age is of paramount importance.

**Table 3.** Linking fundamental Christian values with different forms of educational activity by age of acquisition

<b>Christian commandments as moral values</b>	<b>Age of acquisition</b>	<b>Forms of activity</b>
1. „I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.	These values are acquired at rather advanced age levels, starting with preadolescence and continuing with the adolescence and adult age, being connected with a certain level of spiritual growth. Such values are also dependent on an individual's personal history, occurring as a result of their own searches.	Behavioural models provided by parents, family and community (the educational environments that promote these values: the family, the community).  The religion class (the educational environment that promotes these values: the school)  Participation in religious activities (the educational environment that promotes these values: the church)
2. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not worship them or serve them.		
3. Thou shalt not take the		

name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.		
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shalt labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God;	Such a value is acquired naturally from early childhood, based on behavioural models provided by family, and is stabilized as a result of internalizing it.	Family behavioural habits (alternating daily activities – sleep) The school program followed by the weekend for recovery The religion class – outlines more than the need for physical rest, revealing – also – the need for spiritual recovery/rediscovery of the human being, in church, on Sunday, by sharing with God Various adult education programs for highlighting the effects of overwork
5. Honor thy father and thy mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Synthesis: one must honour one’s parents).	Values that are acquired from early childhood and gradually stabilize during the following ages.	Behavioural models provided by parents, the family, the community (the educational environments that promotes these values: the family, the community).
6. Thou shalt not kill.		The religion class (the educational environment that promotes these values: the school)
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.		
8. Thou shalt not steal.		
9 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour (Synthesis: one must not lie!)		Participation in religious activities (the educational environment that promotes these values: the church)
10. Thou shalt not covet your neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor’s.”	Such a value is acquired naturally from childhood (begins with an educational message: <i>do not covet what is not yours</i> ) and continues at the other ages in relation to the individual’s level of maturity and awareness of rules and moral behaviours .	Daily/casual activities Special activities organized in the school education environment Messages promoted during religious activities

Some of the commandments focus on the types of values on the basis of which the human being acquires a rich and healthy spiritual life that helps it enter into harmony with oneself and the world (Commandments 1, 2, 3). Other commandments focus on how people relate to each other, receiving marks for a behaviour based on mutual respect: honour your parents, do not kill,

do not be lustful, do not steal, do not lie, do not covet what is not yours (Commandments 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). The fourth Commandment can perform a dual function in contemporary society: a spiritual one - to bring tribute to God for His act of perfect creation - and a practical one - to suggest the human being to conserve energy by resting. How wonderful would the ensuing values concert be if the three educational settings could work together in the same direction!!! But who should orchestrate them?!

## Conclusions

The Christian Decalogue represents the oldest source of inspiration for the formation of the younger generation in the spirit of certain values that will always remain available to humanity. It suggests individuals some concrete ways to come into balance with themselves, with the others and with the world, which is, in fact, the essential purpose of education. In a definition set out more with the heart than with the mind, Mother Sica considered that “Pedagogy means ... decent guidance of the human being to virtue, since childhood” (Mother Sica, 1991, p. 91). Once acquired, the path of virtue is hard to be cancelled.

It seems that today’s world, wandering in ephemeral searches, lost the very PATH. In order to regain it we will have to rethink the behavioural patterns that we provide to our children and youth, being aware that “the role models and antimodels are of paramount importance in all forms of education” (Perelman, 1979, p. 134). It is these behavioural models provided to the younger generation that we will have to set our face to with increased attention!

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