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## **An Analysis of the Religious Education Textbooks in Serbia\***

### **Synopsis:**

The course in religious education as an elective was introduced into elementary schools in Serbia during 2002-2003, and gradually the textbooks for Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and Islam religions have been published for individual classes for elementary and high schools in the course of several subsequent years. During 2008-2009 school year I conducted research about those textbooks with the goal to establish to what degree they reflect inter-religious and gender perspective which was underwritten in the Textbooks Law. The corpus of empirical data consists of 21 textbooks, 2100 pages total of the examined text in three languages (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian), published in a state run company, The Institute for Textbooks and Curriculum in Belgrade. I have concluded that inter-religious and gender perspectives in selected textbooks are for the most part missing; furthermore, they rather mirror a patriarchal educational model of the community where students live, and not a religious message about spirituality, which is the main goal of a religious education.

Keywords: inter-religious dialog, gender perspective, school, students, textbooks, religious education

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

With democratic processes in Serbia, at the beginning of XXI century, the discussion in Serbian public was initiated and developed related to the introduction of religious education as an elective into elementary and high schools: many intellectuals believed that this step was a concession to the theocratic government, while those that dealt with practical questions of teaching in schools pointed to the educational and didactic difficulties: an absence of textbooks, unpreparedness of schools and teachers for such teaching. Remarks were justified because textbooks were only gradually been published for individual grades within the period of eight years (2002-2009) and the discussions for and against religious education spread in the public as well as the question of the content of such a class in relation to another elective which was introduced at the same time – Civil Education.

*Religious education* was introduced as an elective in elementary and high schools in Serbia during 2003-2004 school year with the explanation to “offer students a holistic religious outlook of the world and life and to allow them free adoption of *spiritual* and life’s values of the church or a community to which they *historically* belong, which is preservation and nourishment of their own religious and cultural identity” (Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia, 2001,7, italic S.S.). In the public the discussion pertained to the foundational goal of this course (because spirituality can be achieved by other means), as well as about the intention that spirituality be deepened within “a community to which the students historically belong” which doesn’t assume a vital dialog with those who are historically (or in any other way) outside that community.

Serbia is a multilingual and multi-religious state, and an approval to conduct religious education within the school’s curriculum on the territory of Serbia was granted to seven religious communities: Serbian Orthodox church, Catholic Church, Islam community, Slovakian evangelical church, Slovakian Christian church, Christian Reformation church and Jewish community. This implies that some religious communities didn’t get the approval (for instance, various Protestant communities in Vojvodina which have a long history of its existence and a significant number of followers) and related to this, everything happening within the framework of the organization of religious education teaching is missing for those communities in schools, so their religious education is conducted within their religious communities.

Gender sensitive researchers of religious issues mainly, have been involved in the empirical studies, as follows: Bojana Aleksov (2004), sociologists – Nada Sekulić (2001), Zorica Kuburić and Snežana Dačić (2004), ethnologist Lidija Radulović (2003,2012), philosopher Janja Bačević (2004); psycholinguist Svenka Savić (2009).

In 2003 *Svenka Savić* and her associates applied a discourse analysis to the textbooks in native

language (Serbian) in an elementary schools in Vojvodina (Serbia) and came to a conclusion that in those textbooks the representation of male and female roles was patriarchal and that they are insufficiently sensitive to the gender dimension in the Serbian language. Later on, by applying a critical analysis of discourse Savić demonstrated an insufficiency of a linguistic formation of texts in the textbooks for religious education and made a suggestion for a change of this type of writing in the textbooks (2009).

*Janja Bačević (2004)* analyzed gender stereotypes and politics of education in the textbooks for religious education for the first grade of elementary schools of Eastern Orthodox religion (by the author, Ignjacije Midić). She concludes that “ true power of stereotypical representations (and specifically in those related to gender roles) lies in the fact that they not only tell us the reality of things, but also how they should look – in other words, they create attitudes, expectations and relationship of an individual towards the world they encounter”. It is important to point out here that stereotypes show what is “normal” for how things should look. And, as with every norm, other possibilities are excluded which can also have a potential to be the norm.

*Zorica Kuburić and Snežana Dačić (2004)* found out the need for guidance for a religious education teachers in their practical work so they published the book about the methodology for religious teaching (unfortunately, it was not approved for the curriculum in the schools in Serbia).

*Lidija Radulovic (2013, 105)* in her analysis of the textbooks applied discourse analysis to the representation of a family in the textbooks for religious education in Serbia in elementary and high schools for Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic communities, and concluded that those textbooks legitimize traditional (often conservative) moral values which construct “a patriarchal model of gender relationships and hierarchy in a family, and which are not in accordance with the changed model in which young generations live. Textbooks for religious education are anachronistic, and they inspire a patriarchal model of families, they are not adapted to the contemporary concepts of families and their way of life, so they have little associations with reality”.

## **2.0 RESEARCH GOAL**

The goal of this research was to analyze the process of decision making in the publication of textbooks for religious education and elements (implicit and explicit) of gender and inter-religious discrimination in the texts of the textbooks which are used in Serbia in elementary (and high) schools, using discourse analysis.

The hypothesis stated that textbooks reflected Plan and Program adopted by the Ministry of Education, so what appears in the textbooks by individual authors is not a desire of individuals, but rather it reflects the attitude approved by the Ministry of Education in the state of Serbia.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

Corpus of empirical data for analysis comprises the following: 1. Data about the approval procedure of textbooks (in accordance with the Ministry of Education and with the bishop/synod's blessing, printed in a state institution, The Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Material in Belgrade); 2. Data about the curriculum of religious education in elementary (high) schools for Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic religions (which is conducted in three languages – Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian – all derived from the former Serbo-Croatian language), and comparative data are from the two Protestant communities (in languages of the national communities – Slovakian and Hungarian). 3. Data from the textbooks texts for the religious education for Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic teaching, printed in agreement with the adopted curriculum and its application in Serbia.

There are three units of analysis: body text, a sentence, a word. By body text I mean a unit bigger than a sentence which can be in the form of verbal material that consists of the following: a basic (main) body text, a didactic apparatus: questions, the message about religion and various citations and non-verbal elements (drawings, images, photos and other companion to the text). I have analyzed the way a basic (main) text relates to other didactic parts of text. The type of text is either monologs (narrations) or dialogs (interactions according to age groups, gender, familiarity with the material). Smaller units of text are *sentences* (syntactic, units which require a verb). I have calculated the total number of sentences in a text and median length measured by words. The smallest unit of analysis is a *word* (a collection of characters separated by blank spaces in a text).

### 4.0 RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

#### *4.1 Data about the procedure for textbooks approval process*

The state company, The Institute for Textbooks and Curriculum is in charge of publishing textbooks about religious education. Though the Law about textbooks was passed in Serbia in 2015, textbooks publishing has been monopolized because The Ministry of Education has approved only publications by The Institute for Textbooks and Curriculum for use in schools. The procedure for the approval of textbooks for religious education has been designed in such a way that the highest ranks in church (synod and bishop) select the author (those are mainly episcopos), they give them blessings, and the Ministry of Education approves it (in each copy for every grade of the religious education at the very beginning of a textbook it writes: "With blessings of St. Archpriest Synod of Serbian Orthodox Church" (that is, for Catholic books: "Msgr. Dr. Janos Penzes, Subotica bishop"), and at the bottom of the same page there is information that says that The Ministry of Education

approves the textbook. Synod/bishop are superior to the Ministry of Education in such a way that they select one author they trust for all grades of elementary schools – one episcopo writes all textbooks for orthodox religion; one bishop writes all textbooks for catholic religion, and the Ministry just approves the selection. After the author finishes his manuscript of the textbook, it is reviewed by a team comprised of mainly the same persons, people of trust of synod/bishop (for instance, in orthodox catechism, that person is at the same time employed by the Ministry of Education – a state body that approves textbooks, which is an example of a conflict of interest).

Teachers of religious education can become selected people by synod, that is, bishop (if they receive blessing), and they use textbooks for religious education printed at the Institute. Additionally, evaluation data about the teaching are sent to the Ministry of Churches (not to the Ministry of Education) and thus far have not been made public. In short, textbook publishing for religious education is a tightly controlled process and has been monopolized by churches, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Churches. It has been estimated that today that in the whole of Serbia around 1300 teachers have conducted classes in religious education, of whom the majority is men (the exact number is impossible to establish because teachers are contracted by a special agreement for a limited time – for the most part they don't have full time jobs in schools, but rather they work in several schools so that they can fulfill their weekly class load as outlined by the Law).

#### *4. 2 Data about the Religious Education Curriculum: gender and inter-religious perspective*

I have analyzed texts in the Book of Regulations for the curriculum of the religious education for elementary schools (Official Herald – Educational Herald, number 10, August 12, 2004) which was written by the Ministry of Education in Serbia, and as a comparative material I have used the same document for high schools (Official Herald – Educational herald, October 10, 2003) for Orthodox (in Serbian and Roma), Catholic (in Croatian) and Islamic (in Bosnian) teaching which is conducted in a multicultural and multi-ethnic Vojvodina. In the curriculum I have looked for elements of (discouragement)/encouragement for inter-religious dialog and for (un)recognition of gender equality. The number of credits is the same for all denominations for religious education: one *hour* a week, which totals 36 hours annually. At the beginning of every school year students select their elective which can be religious education or civil education (knowledge about themselves and others). The success of students in religious education is evaluated by instructors in a descriptive manner (good and satisfactory). The grade doesn't affect general success of a student (other relevant information can be found in the book by Zorica Kuburić and Slobodanka Dačić, (2004, pp. 72-75).

However, there are differences in the description of individual curriculum, from the perspective of

general intent, which can be exemplified by comparing goals of religious education in the first grade for Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic teaching of religious education.

The goal of teaching of *orthodox* catechism for the first grade of elementary schools is “an acceptance that existence is an expression of the wholeness of an individual, and that an individual exists only in a community of freedom with other people.”... In order to avoid the danger of interpreting every kind of community to potentially be the basis of true existence, it is necessary to have in mind and emphasize “*the liturgical community as the only true one*” because within it the communion with God and Christ is realized (p.73, italic S.S.). And in a liturgical community are those that belong to Orthodox religion.

Furthermore, under general remarks for the first grade it is stated: “When it comes to holy holidays, special attention should be paid to the holy Serbs: St. Sava, St. Simeon, during the holy holiday, St. Vitus, etc”. (p.72) Creators of the curriculum for teaching religious education for orthodox catechism (the majority of Serbian people) teach students about their national identity and their own community. However, teaching students about the connection between religious and national interests is missing from their religious education class in the curriculum of other religious groups because their members belong to different national communities in Vojvodina (for example, students of Croatian, Hungarian and Slovakian nationality choose Catholic religious education, and the students from Protestant churches are of very different national identities in the same religious group). Therefore, some religious groups are nationally homogenous, while others are heterogeneous.

The goals of teaching Islamic religious education in the first grade of elementary schools are: “recognition of the basic teachings of their religion; getting to know the most important dates with Muslim people; getting to know the importance of everyday teaching of Koran”. (p.74) The holy book is the basis of teaching of religious education from the very beginning, written in Arabic (and in a mosque prayers are conducted in that language) so the students need to, from the very beginning, through their religion, learn Arabic ,too, which binds all pious people of Islam regardless of their national identity. It appears as if the textbook in this teaching had less importance than the person conducting the class. In fact, in the curriculum there are estimates that “religious education is a joint effort between the teacher and the student, and for its teaching it is recommended in the textbook, *Religious Education Textbook for the Second Grade* by Hazema Nistović that “the starting point be the reality...the material studied...has to find its application in the life of a student”. (pp.75-76) “The goal of *Catholic* religious education in the first grade is to familiarize students with God, Father, His Love, to have them understand that *the parent* and this beautiful world are God’s gifts, then to get to know Jesus Christ, who was sent to us by Father as a token of greatest love... Our goal is to

instill in a student joy and to make him/her give back Father's love with joy". (p.76, italics S.S.). In this instance, parents are introduced as a component of religious education teaching, which is missing in the goals of other above mentioned groups.

We can conclude that what those three teachings of religious education in the first grade of elementary schools have in common is the fact that interreligious communication in the curriculum is missing, which is otherwise explicitly present in the curriculum for the first grade of elementary schools of the two Protestant churches: (in Slovakian) for Evangelical-Lutheran religious education of the Slovak evangelical church A.D. and (in Hungarian) for the Reformation-Christian church. For the former it is stated: "The goal of the religious education in the first grade is to share with children happy news of the God's words and God's truth as well as *development of positive attitudes towards the members of other religious doctrines and their tradition and culture*" (p. 78, italic S.S.). And for the latter: "The goal of religious education is to share with children happy news of God's words and God's truth" as well as to *develop positive attitudes towards the members of other religious doctrines, their tradition and culture* (p.79, italic S.S.).

In the holistic attitude in the teaching of religious education as directed towards its own doctrine during the development of spirituality, above mentioned examples for the initial shaping of spirituality in the first grade of elementary schools serve as evidence for an orientation towards national religious identity with the majority of people, the influence of parents, referral to the holy book of all (Muslims) as well as towards an inherent component of a child's spirituality, but not towards interreligious connections. Only the examples of Protestant churches (in minority), already in the first grade of elementary schools direct their teaching of religious education towards other religious communities and cultures and thus they interlink spirituality 'with others' from the very beginning of their education of a child's individuality (what remains is to explore to what degree this kind of approach contribute to interreligious dialog in later years of their education).

Efforts for consistent gender perspective are missing from the curriculum and; they imply misogynistic relationship towards woman, which can then be explicitly found in the texts and photos of individual lessons in the textbooks for religious education (Milinkov, 2012).

#### *4.3 Results of analysis of textbooks for religious education for the first grade of elementary schools of Orthodox religion in the Serbian language*

I have analyzed the first text of the orthodox catechism for the first grade of elementary schools. The text of the whole textbook is in Serbian written in Cyrillic alphabet, unlike the Catholic textbook for religious education where already in the first grade quotes from the holy script are introduced, which

is, in Islamic religious education from Koran and thus make students pay attention to the differences between the texts of the textbook authors and the texts from holy scriptures. The author gives titles of the lessons in accordance with the proposal from the Curriculum for the first grade. After the main text, there follows a didactic section divided into three basic units: message about religion, questions, suggestions for activities (drawings, conversations, etc.).

The main text of the first lesson, "Love", I divided into three basic units (here they are separated by dashes): child's joy about the bird, the loss of the bird, message about love. Then I divided the whole text into sentences – 37 sentences total. Before every sentence I have provided the total number of words in it; then I added up the number of words in all sentences and got a median length of a sentence for the first session – 17.2 words on average.

(the number of words in a sentence is given at the beginning)

ORIGINAL:

- 8** Mama je malom Bogoljubu za Vaskrs poklonila ptičicu.
- 5** Bogoljub se mnogo obradovao daru.
- 8** Ni sam nije znao zašto se toliko raduje.
- 18** Imao je Bogoljub mnogo igračaka i sve su mu one bile drage, ali je ovu ptičicu posebno zavoleo.
- 8** Biće da je to stoga što je živa.
- 18** Doduše, kad god bi se igrao sa drugovima, on je i igračke nekako gledao kao da su žive.
- 17** Na kraju je razumeo: ptičica mu je bila posebno draga zato što mu je nju poklonila mama.
- 5** A on mamu mnogo voli.
- 11** Bogoljub je sa ptičicom, koju je nazvao Kića, ostvario pravu zajednicu.
- 15** Hranio je i brinuo se o njoj - da bude čista, da se zimi ne prehladi...
- 9** Ili da je ne bi, kojim slučajem, dohvatila maca...
- 7** I ptičica je posebno volela malog Bogoljuba.
- 13** Kad bi se Bogoljub vratio kući iz škole, ona bi tako veselo čavrljala.
- 27** Sletela bi mu na rame, stavila mu svoj kljunić u uho i milo mrmorila kao da mu priča nešto posebno, nešto što nije želela da drugi čuju.

TRANSLATION:

"Love"

(the first unit: a child's joy for the bird)

8 The mother gave little Bogoljub a little bird for Easter.

5 Bogoljub was very happy about the gift.

8 He for his part couldn't tell why he was so happy.

18. Bogoljub had many toys and all of them were dear to him, but he showed special love for this little bird.

17 In the end he understood: the little bird was especially dear to him because his mother gave it to

him.

5 And he loves his mom very much.

11 With the little bird that he called Kica, Bogoljub developed a special relationship.

15 He fed it and took care of it – to be clean, that it doesn't get cold during winter...

9 Or that by any chance, a cat doesn't grab it...

7 And the little bird specially loved little Bogoljub.

13 When Bogoljub returns home from school, it will merrily chirp.

27 It would land on his shoulder, put its beak into his ear and would gently murmur as if it were saying something to him, something it didn't want others to hear.

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SECOND UNIT: ORIGINAL:

8 Jednog dana mali Bogoljub se vrati iz škole.

9 Uđe u kuću, ali ne ču svog prijatelja Kiću.

6 Uđe u sobu, ali Kiće nema.

11 Vidi on: kavez otvoren, prozor otvoren, a ptičice nema u sobi.

6 Dugo je Bogoljub tražio svog Kiću.

5 Pošto ga ne nađe, zaplaka.

17 Malo kasnije otac i majka se vrate kući i zatekoše malog Bogoljuba kako plače za nestalim Kićom.

20 Tešili su ga i obećavali mu da će mu već sutradan kupiti drugu ptičicu, lepšu nego što je bio Kića.

6 Ali, mali Bogoljub nije hteo drugu.

15 Tugovao je on za svojim Kićom i hteo je da mu vrate njega, samo njega.

19 Mama i tata su mu govorili da to nije moguće i da jedino mogu da mu nabave drugu ptičicu.

7 Mali Kića je sada sigurno sa drugovima.

20 I njemu je teško bez tebe, ali on je ipak ptičica i treba da bude tamo gde su ostale ptice.

17 No, on tebe neće zaboraviti, a nećeš ni ti njega - govorili su **tata i mama** malom Bogoljubu.

14. Kada tu drugu ptičicu zavoliš - govorili su - i ona će biti tvoj najmiliji Kića.

TRANSLATION:

(second unit: the loss of bird)

8 One day Bogoljub returns home from school.

9 He enters the house, but he doesn't hear his friend Kica.

6 He enters the room, but there is no Kica.

11 He realizes: the cage open, the window open, and there is no bird in the room.

6 He searched for his Kica for a long time.

5 Since he couldn't find it, he began to cry.

17 Little later the mother and father come home and find little Bogoljub in tears over lost Kica.

20 They comforted him and promised that already tomorrow they would buy him another little bird, more beautiful than Kica.

6 But little Bogoljub didn't want the other.

15 He mourned for his Kica and wanted it back, only that bird.

19 Mom and dad were telling him that it was not possible and they could only get him a new bird.

7 Little Kica is probably now with its friends.

20 It is also having a hard time without you, but it is still a bird and it should be where other birds are.

17 However, it won't forget you, and you will not forget it – **dad and mom** were saying to little Bogoljub.

14 When this other little bird you fall in love to – they were telling him – it will then be your most precious Kica.

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THIRD UNIT:ORIGINAL:

4. Ljubav nam donosi radost.

12 Ona čini da ljudi i priroda oko nas budu jedinstveni i neponovljivi.

33 Ovo poslednje je mali Bogoljub razumeo, jer je on svojom ljubavlju činio da sve njegove igračke budu žive, ali nije mogao da razume zašto Kiću ne može da zameni ni jedna druga ptičica.

12 Biće da je zbog toga što je on svoga Kiću mnogo voleo.

4 A i Kića njega.

29 Mali Bogoljub se na kraju ipak utešio kad su mu tata i mama kazali da je Kića svakako živ i da je sigurno srećan jer je sa svojim drugovima.

22 Zbog toga je Bogoljub kad god su dolazile druge ptičice u njihovu baštu ispred kuće, tu među njima video i svog Kiću.

6 Ili mu se bar tako činilo?

2 Ne zna.

16 No, od tada je Bogoljub voleo i pazio sve ptičice, jer su sve one postale njegove.

TRANSLATION:

(third unit: message about love)

4. Love brings us happiness.

12 It makes people and nature unique and original.

33 This last one little Bogoljub understood, because with his love he made all his toys come alive, but he couldn't understand why Kica cannot be replaced by any other bird.

12 It is probably because he loved his Kica very much.

4. And Kica loved him, too.

29 Little Bogoljub was in the end comforted when his dad and mom told him that Kica was certainly alive and it is for sure happy because it is with its friends.

22 Because of this Bogoljub, whenever other birds came into their garden in front of the house, he saw his Kica among them.

6 Or it only appeared that way to him?

2. He doesn't know.

16 However, from then on, Bogoljub loved and took care of all the birds, because they all became his.

I have concluded that this text is way too long and very complex for a child that is just starting the process of literacy at the beginning of the school of the first grade. The length of a sentence doesn't work for the initial process of literacy for children. The number of words and the length of sentences in this lesson are bigger than is the linguistic knowledge of the first graders as related to the reading of a text, but also in terms of their spontaneous production in a conversation with grown-ups and their peers; for reading purposes those sentences are not adjusted to their age group and their cognitive faculties (fine print, complex orthography rules) in order for them to capture the meaning of love from those sentences and then to translate it into their own linguistic and religious experience – to further explore the results intended by the text – acquiring spirituality.

Message about the religion is a didactic part of the lesson. The total number of sentences (6) I have divided by the number of words (73) and have concluded that the average length of a sentence is too long for this age group – 12,1 words. According to established standards for students in the age group 6-7, the length of a sentence should not be longer than 6-8 words (Ivan Ivić, 2008). The next step was to analyze the content in the message about the religion. Is there a message and if so, how is it related to the main text? We found out that those two parts of the lesson did not have an immediate connection, and in the text about this message the content is provided which students should know as a dogmatic truth about their own religion:

12 With *love* we can find out things which we cannot find using *reason* and other senses.

20 Nature that surrounds us, and specially people, we know best when we fall in love with them, that is, when we become part of that community based on love.

13 However, *God* we cannot discover by any means, not with reason, not by vision – only with love.

7 Because nobody has ever seen God.

12 *God's Son* who became man, Jesus Christ, discovered God to people.

9 When we fall in love with another man, then we discover God in him.

I have marked the words here which I believe children in 6-7 age group at the beginning of their schooling in the first grade do not know the meaning of: *God, reason, community of love, God's Son*. I have estimated that it is difficult for them to understand the meaning of the following sentence:

*When we fall in love with another man, then we discover God in him.* A child can only rely on adults (parents) to read him/her the text and by repeating it several times to memorize it which is the message about religion by imitation, so that he/she can use the memorized sentence in a context.

Questions are the second part of a didactic apparatus. In the end, in the same way I have calculated the length of questions: the number of words in a sentence and evaluate the relationship between questions and the main text.

ORIGINAL:

- 3 Šta je ljubav?
- 7 Kako nam izgleda priroda kad je volimo?
- 12 Da li možemo da volimo prirodu, a da ne volimo nijednog čoveka?
- 19 Kako se osećaš kad si sam, a kako kad si zajedno sa onima koje voliš i koji tebe vole?

TRANSLATION:

- 3. What is love?
- 7 How does the nature look when we love it?
- 12 Can we love nature and not love a single man?
- 19 How do you feel when you are alone, and how, when you are together with those you love and those they love you?

The questions refer to the main text, however, for a child in the age group 6-7 it is not easy to answer them. The last question consists of two questions which methodologically is not appropriate for this age group.

- 1. How do you feel when you are alone?
- 2. How do you feel when you are together with those you love?

The size of characters can also be included in the linguistic analysis and thus we can claim that they are too small for students of this age group to recognize as letters inside a word. Furthermore, we can include the application of orthography in this analysis (the use of capital letters in a manner established in religious print, but not in textbooks, that is, capital letters for pronouns when they mean God, Son, Holy Spirit – He, Him); additionally, the use of punctuation in the text (period, coma, dash, colon – all of which children learn in later grades). If we look at types of sentences we can see they are complex and they are dependent complex (as it is the case with relative and conditional sentences which students learn in later grades), then inserted sentences etc. I have here concluded that the verbal part is not appropriate for this age group.

I have then analyzed images that accompany text and concluded that questions have no connection to the visuals. Images do not even have a function for the text because the author doesn't refer to

them, but rather, in the end he provides instructions for a free selection of activities (draw what you like most).

Additionally, there are words in the text that we believe children of this age group do not quite know the meaning of. The most frequent words in the textbook for the first grade of Orthodox religion (but also for the second and the third grade) are those which support authority of religion, which is expected (*Jesus, God*) but also authorities in the church as an institutions (*priest, episcopo*), which is less expected.

In short, at all three levels of linguistic analysis (text, sentence, word) of the authored text we have concluded that parts of the lesson are not functionally linked in order to support knowledge of students through incremental guidance from the text to the questions about the text and linking the text with the non-verbal material.

These few pieces of data indicate that the text in the textbooks for religious education written by a church authority (episcopo) doesn't develop critical thinking of students; this kind of didactic design of individual lessons in textbooks doesn't contribute to the overall goal of education, as well as to the goal of a good textbook.

#### *4.4 Examples for deepening interreligious similarities and differences*

One of the tasks of religious teaching is to develop love towards others, as the foundation of both Christian and Islamic religion, and those others could be people of a different religion. In the lesson for the senior level in high school titled "Some differences between Roman Catholic and Orthodox organization of Church the text ends with the sentence: "It is necessary that the whole structure of Roman Catholic church aligns with that which was in existence before schism, and which is still preserved by Orthodox church" (Ignjatije Midić, 2006, pp.97-98). This sentence suggests that those others should change in the direction of the Orthodox organization of Church, which sounds more like a call to non-cooperation than love. For now we can conclude that textbooks for religious education for the most part do not contribute to the development of critical thinking when it comes to interreligious dialog.

There are numerous opportunities for teachers of religious education to introduce a dimension of interreligious sensitivity using the material itself adopted by religious communities. For instance, religious texts from two sister churches (which pious people recite every time they go to the service) can be introduced, but in such a way to show *similarities* in that basic prayer among the three Christian confessions. Students alone can come up with conclusions about the differences, after they see similarities.

#### 4.5 Examples for deepening gender sensitive communication in Orthodox textbooks for religious education

Almost all research on the textbooks for elementary schools for various subjects (native language, social sciences, history, civil education etc.) show that gender perspective is for the most part missing (Bačević, 2004; Zilka Spahić Šiljak, 2008), so it is not unexpected that we will not find it in the textbooks for religious education in Serbia, but it is, if compared to the situation with textbooks in other countries in Europe. In the analyzed textbooks for Orthodox religion the basic approach of the author is to exclude woman from God's creation. That basic idea is realized in various verbal and non verbal ways consistently in different lessons.

In the second grade there is a text titled "God we believe in, is Father". The author consistently uses the verb *give birth (roditi)* for man, though this verb is always associated with woman in the Serbian language; the author 'deprives' woman of her gender specific characteristic and assigns it to man. In the following text the father explains to the son:

"God didn't give birth to us in order to be our Father;

You are the father to only Milica and myself because you gave birth to us.

We call God Father because He is the Father of Jesus Christ, who he gave birth to.

We do not call our parents fathers only because they gave birth to us but primarily because we love them.

Here is an example: your friend Goran was adopted by my friend Bogoljub, which means he didn't give birth to him."

The author continues to explain why it is important to know who gave birth to you because "this signifies a relationship of love that the two of us share", as the author states. Mother, woman is therefore excluded from parent love as she is excluded from God's creation, too. She is only implicitly present in the explanation about love. The author further excludes mother from a much more important space, and that is liturgy. The author further states:

"This means we live in a community in which God is our Father, and we, his *sons*. This community with God we create during Liturgy."

In this lesson (and consistently in those given in the form of discussions with children) a basic patriarchal model of communication only with the same sex partners is mirrored: female-female and male-male, when experience and knowledge are transferred from the adults to the young. So, in the

first lesson the grandmother talks with the grandson, and in the second, father talks with son. Additionally, the words, *girl or female student* are not used in the text, among family members *son and father* dominate; for a female person we can rather say that she is absent than present in the text of these textbooks (there is no mention of *daughter or mother* in the explanation of God's love, either).

#### *4.6 Examples of deepening the gender sensitive communication in the textbooks for Islamic religion*

Zilka Spahić Šiljak (2008) has concluded that the textbooks for Islamic religious education mirror patriarchal values and roles of man and woman in the society in this form of religious teaching in schools. In the lesson, "Obligations towards a family" in the textbook for the first grade students read the following:

"Family members assembled: mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, younger brother. Older boy, older brother and older sister. Everybody does their own thing. Grandma lulls a child to sleep. Dad learns Koran, grandpa and older brother bow, mom and Suada wash dishes, older sister reads a book. Suada's home is full of love and work."

Men are in charge of prayer in the family and in the mosque, and mother and Suada wash dishes. The author has concluded that women's activities are shown as they have an inferior status in the society, for the most part service sectors where the life of the community as a whole is ensured, or its male members. She also came up with a conclusion that there is a stereotypical presentation of woman in the main text and in a didactic apparatus. The author didn't pay a special attention to the possibilities of interreligious dialog, so I can only add here that in these textbooks there are explicit teachings that we have to deprive ourselves from everything in the service of others, and this implies that those others are from another religion. As for the language, texts in the textbooks for religious education for Muslim children are for the most part adjusted to the age group of students in such a way that texts are short and written in a simplified way, as in the first reader in the first grade of elementary schools.

The type of the text formation conforms to what students learn in their native language classes of this age group. However, methodological questions remain open when we consider alphabet used in these texts in the second grade: Cyrillic alphabet (initial alphabet for students of the first grade in the Republic of Serbia), but the words are from Arabic inventory, which can create a problem for

students, above all because some sayings are also written in the original Arabic alphabet. When it comes to gender perspective in those textbooks we can conclude that stereotypes associated with girls and boys have been repeated. Girls are dressed in alignment with their religious requirements: covered heads, long sleeves, long skirts.

#### *4.7 The textbook for Orthodox religious education for the first grade of elementary schools in the Roma language*

In 2002 the textbook for religious education in Gurbeti dialect of Roma language was printed, for the first grade of elementary schools, which was a translation of the textbook for Orthodox religion for that grade (Ignjatije Midić, 2002) which means it was intended to mainly Roma children in Vojvodina and north Serbia (because in other parts of Serbia other Roma dialects are used, most often Arli). Synod (who recommends textbooks) and The Institute (that prints textbooks) assume that the majority of Roma children in Serbia practice Orthodox religion, and that the Roma children belonging to other religious communities (Catholic, various Protestant and Islamic) should join those groups during classes for religious education in their own native language.

In practice there are many different cases, of which we here mention only few. Roma children already born in Vojvodina of immigrant parents from Kosovo choose Islam for their religion. Those Roma children attend classes in Serbian in elementary schools (subjects such as The Serbian language, mathematics, natural sciences), they have, as elective, the subject, Roma language with elements of culture (in the Roma language) and Islam religious education as an elective (it is not in the Roma language). The textbook for the first grade for Orthodox and Islam religious education is written in Cyrillic alphabet with Arabic words of religious content, because the first alphabet in the first grade for all children in Cyrillic. For Catholic children who attend classes in the first grade in Serbian, there are textbooks for the first grade in Latin alphabet. It is well known that students learn Latin alphabet in the second grade according to the current curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education.

I introduce here the example of religious education for the children from Roma national community, which is the largest community in Serbia of all minority communities, to show the complexity of the linguistic-didactic teaching of religious education in the process of the spiritual development in order to justify a stand that the religious education as it is conducted in schools across Serbia is not well organized for students of all religions and different native languages. Such empirical data can re-evaluate the hypothesis that native language and spirituality are interconnected in such a way that they condition each other. That is, data can dispel the stereotype that spirituality is linked to a nation

and native language, which Orthodox teachers of religious education require.

I did not study in detail the ways teachers of religious education use the analyzed text in the Roma language in practice. 2000 copies were printed total in 2002, and as of today, the edition has not been reprinted yet, which serves as evidence that the textbook has not been distributed to Roma children in schools across Serbia and thus it has not been implemented in classes. I have concluded that printing of this textbook has had a political background –something important has been accomplished for Roma children from the perspective of taking care of their spiritual development in their native language.

## **1.0 CONCLUSION**

The main goal of this research is to establish to which degree interreligious and gender perspectives are embedded into the goals and realization of published textbooks for religious education in Serbia. The hypothesis stated that textbooks mirrored the Curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, therefore what appears in the authored textbooks is not a desire of individuals but rather an approach approved by the state of Serbia.

I have analyzed approved curricula by the Ministry of Education from the perspective of their main goal, team members who reviewed the material, selection of textbooks authors, main and didactic parts of textbooks lessons, in order to show the complexity of this issue in Serbia which is a multi-religious, multilingual, and multicultural state community, with two selected dimensions – inter-religious and gender based.

The results of analysis show that the approval of the textbooks for religious education in Serbia is a tightly controlled process on the part of religious authorities who are involved in the design of the curriculum, selection of the textbook authors, the selection of the reviewing team and the selection of teachers (they give blessing) to work with students in elementary and high schools.

A detailed analysis of the main didactic text of the lessons shows that textbooks authors (high ranking men in the hierarchy of a religious community – episcopos and bishops) lack didactic knowledge.

The general conclusion is that the textbooks for religious education for all three religious communities in three languages (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian) reflect and support gender stereotypes and gender roles of patriarchal man and woman. The data aligns with the research of other female authors in Serbia and the region (Bačević, 2004; Spahić Šiljak, 2008; Radulović, 2013). Though there are some implicit instructions in the lessons that others must be loved (as the text of holy scriptures commands its pious people), there are no explicit instructions in the analyzed textbooks

that others should be loved that are of other religions.

It is recommended that The Ministry of Education allow the use of textbooks for religious education which connects the two ideologies: the ideology of human rights applied in the elective, "Civil Education", and Christian and Islam ideology of religion as it relates to the development of spirituality visible in an inter-religious and gender practice.

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