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10. The medieval elementary educational system: a contradictory system without social justice

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SUMMARY

Through the review of the relevant bibliography, one can see that the Middle Ages contain elements of knowledge production and culture, although it is usually presented as an empty spiritually historical period. The constant quarrels and barbaric raids seem to have given the false impression that in the Middle Ages ignorance of education prevailed. However, what appears in the writings of historians is that, during the medieval years, humanity was in need and sought to be educated. Thus, educational systems were formed, being based on the triptych: Christianity, Ancient Greek Culture and Roman Philosophy. The medieval educational system, however, despite its efforts to shape a cultural environment, highlighted and reinforced social inequalities. As shown in bibliography, in the medieval years, education presented elements of authoritarian pedagogy with abusive practices against young students. This work will bring to light all of the above, proving that social justice was an unknown word to medieval teachers.

KEY WORDS: Middle Ages, Elementary Education, Monastic Schools, Western Europe, Byzantine, Social Justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

By reviewing the relevant bibliography on the Middle Ages and the types of education, which prevailed at the time, one can understand the anxious attempt of researchers and historians to point out the prevailing misconception that the medieval world is uneducated and ignorant. A century (almost) earlier, dr Hugh Graham, a professor of the history of education, pointed out the traditional historical errors, concerning the state of education in the Middle Ages (Graham, 1933). The barbaric invasions and the generalized violent conflicts, at that time, seemed to play a decisive role in creating a false impression of a complete absence of education. However, relevant bibliography refuses this view, highlighting the need of medieval humanity to find the driving force of its existence, which is knowledge, even among rivers of blood (Haskins, 1955; Riche, 1978; Lindberg, 2007). Therefore, as Karzis points out (1998: 10), instead of their total and leveling rejection and despite their negative observations, Middle Ages would be more correct to be considered as the harbinger of the Renaissance, since this cultural explosion, which illuminated Europe and the world, was certainly not heavenly.

In the middle of the 20th century, historical research began to remove the dark veils of contempt, which covered medieval education and civilization, attempting to highlight those elements that proved the contribution of this period of time to cultural and spiritual construction (Karzis, 1998). The evolution of medieval education reflects the evolution of the relationship between Christianity, ancient Greek culture and Roman philosophy. Christianity was associated with the Greek and Roman traditions and was influenced by them. Jaegan (2000) points out that the situation began to change with the appearance of the first catechism schools from the second AD century, while in the first AD centuries, people, who had adopted Christian philosophy, lived a pagan daily life.

This paper will present the principals that education of social justice represents. There will, also, be a thorough description of the medieval elementary educational system, as it was formed both in the Western and Eastern part of Europe, while its positive and negative points will be highlighted, emphasizing on the lack of equality and social justice.

2. DESCRIBING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION DURING THE MIDDLE AGES: THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS

Regarding the levels of education in the medieval years, informally, education started at a very young age. This type of early education depends on the feudal class of the child's parents. As Vaughn (2000) stated, older children could attend either grammar or monastic school if they showed abilities and their parents could afford it. That is why, only the richest and most accomplished students graduated and continued their education at the first established universities (2000). It is worth noting that the children of the slaveholders were, also, taught the necessary skills by their parents, so that they could survive (Murphy, 2005). The boys used to go out to the fields to observe and help the family with easy tasks, while the girls stayed at home, learning household chores such as weaving, feeding animals, etc (Melville, 2016). The older boys, who came from noble families, learnt how to hunt and handle a gun, while the young ones learnt to cook (2016). In medieval times, the young boys of craftsmen and merchants were trained to learn the secrets of art and trade, in order to become worthy to continue the family heritage, while it is very rare for girls to be assigned such a responsibility. (Karzis, 1998).

A century before, Leach (1915, p.93) stated that the way boys were educated in the medieval years had some special features, such as:

- During the teaching procedure, boys were sitting on the floor.
- Their graphic tools were made of animal bones or ivory and the writing took place on wooden and wax-covered boards.
- Classes lasted from early in the morning until sunset.
- The teaching process involved corporal punishment by the teacher.
- The main way of learning the material was memorization.
- The main education was completed when the boys reached the age of 14 to 15, calling them "scholars", while they could continue their studies in higher education institutions run by bishops.

During the medieval period, much of the classical literature was saved thanks to the copies of the classical texts and the existing monastic schools, which were considered as a preparatory stage for theological education (Leclercq & Misrahi, 1961). As a result, many religious books were written, as well as books that continued the classical tradition of Roman times and were used as textbooks (1961). A typical example is the book of Martianos Capellas (fifth century): "The Marriage of Philology and Hermes", which taught the "Seven Liberal Arts": a) the trivioum: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic or logic and b) the quatrivium: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Lindberg, 2007). The reference of medieval education to the ancient Greek culture is remarkable, while in the sixth century, the first encyclopedias appeared (Pirenne, 1939). Education in medieval Europe varied from kingdom to kingdom (Karzis, 1998). Restricted access became the whip that kept the population in line, while for those lucky enough to be educated, it was a sword that freed them from a life of ignorance and forced slavery (1998).

Below, a presentation of these spots of education in the Middle Ages will be attempted, in two sections: in the first part, reference will be made to the elementary education of the medieval west, while, in the second part, the elementary education in the medieval east (Byzantium) will be presented.

3. MEDIEVAL WESTERN EUROPE: EDUCATION IN TEMPLES AND MONASTERIES

According to Karzis (1998), historians do not agree on the dates of the beginning and end of the medieval era, but they place an indisputable chronological milestone in the fifth century AD, during of which, the world was buried under a bloodbath tombstone, due to the barbaric invasions, which ravaged and eventually succeeded in conquering Central, Western and much of Southern Europe.

The barbaric peoples carried out continuous and extensive violent raids, drowning in blood the western part of Europe. Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Burgundians, Lombards, Swedes, Thuringians, Alans, Alamanites, Jutes, Gepids, Picts, Saxons, etc. composed a long, grim list of bloody attacks, plunging the whole of Central and Southern Europe into chaos and disaster (1998). After the barbarians conquered Western Europe, it was natural for the fate of European education to depend on them. Historical reality, however, refutes the association of the decline of European education with barbaric peoples. In fact, despite the adherence of these peoples to the development of military skills, they maintained their admiration for the Greco-Roman culture, which they felt "as a mysterious force, beyond their own capabilities" (1998, p. 30).

If there was one thing that characterized medieval life and education in Western Europe, this was the monastic life. It, first, appeared during the medieval years from 500 AD to 1500 AD: the time between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance (Fersoco & Muessig, 2000). The term "monasticism" refers to a way of life inextricably linked to religion and the rules that govern it (Leclercq & Misrahi, 1961). Monastic schools were the most important and numerous educational institutions during the Middle Ages in Western Europe.

Monastic life is made up of four fundamental ideals (Haskins, 1955; Lindberg, 2007):

1) The main idea of monasticism is asceticism. In its original meaning, asceticism concerned the training or discipline of the athlete in the preparation of the games. In its figurative use it indicates the submission or discipline of all bodily desires and human emotions, so that the mind and soul can be dedicated to the spiritual values of higher life. The highest moral thought of asceticism was the increase of spiritual excellence and insight through the elimination of all natural and material desires. A person must be an ascetic in all his thoughts and actions. According to the ascetic philosophy, life on this earth is not complete and its fulfillment depends on death. This life on earth is a preparation for heavenly life. For this reason man should not be greedy for material possessions and physical pleasure.
2) Poverty was another important feature associated with monasticism.
3) Purity was the third qualification of a monk. A monk must be unmarried, he must not have a family, including spouses and children.
4) Another important characteristic of monasticism was obedience and belief in the order of monks. Self-determination was not allowed, while obedience to the doctrines of the Christian religion was necessary.

Monasticism in Europe became a social issue. The ideals of solitary life and asceticism were directly related to education and were expressed through discipline and obedience. Each of the above monastic ideals introduced new factors into social development, such as the habit of obedience as

opposed to the strong individualism, which came to life through the state of war and violent invasions at that time (Woods, 2019). Monasticism influenced education in many ways, promoting moral development as the main goal. From the seventh to the thirteenth century A.D. there was no other education than that offered by the monastic schools (Ferzoco & Muessig, 2000). In Western Medieval Europe, education was not a mass affair, since most people outside the church were illiterate.

In the early medieval years, ecclesiastical schools were also the only schools. For the purpose of teaching the "beginners", the monks had to read and keep books and manuscripts. Each monastery had a library room and a room for manuscripts, while there was a separate writing area, which became known as the Latin name "Scriptorium" (Karzis, 1998). In medieval times, monasteries were reserves of literature and learning. According to Vaughn (2000), some of them had large libraries and paid special attention to the collection of books through a regular book exchange system. Mechanic printing methods were not invented and, therefore, due to the need to reproduce the manuscripts, the basic way of reprinting was based on the manual copying of the original texts (2000).

4. THE POSITION OF THE CHILD IN THE MONASTIC EDUCATION

The main shortcomings of monastic education were a consequence of the ideal of solitary life and relate to the following (Karzis, 1998; Brooks, 2002; Melville, 2016):

- In the medieval era, during the period of monasticism, family life was completely neglected. Emotions and human desires were exterminated through cruel practices, even corporal punishment, with the emphasis on repentance. Therefore, the educational system, provided by the monasteries, was highly traditional and was based on the principles of unwavering monastic discipline through harsh and rigorous pedagogical practices, which included corporal punishment and abuse as a method of repentance and return "to the right path."
- The state, the largest human organization, was neglected, as the monks had no obligation to it.
- Monasticism ignored the economic life of the people, since monastic education was mainly of a religious nature.
- In monastic schools the study was not an end in itself but a disciplinary means. The only literature taught was religious, excluding any other type of text. As a result, young students were educated in an environment with prejudices and one-dimensional values and views, which they were forced to embrace, otherwise they were imposed on them through harsh ways of punishment.

Whiting (1968) stated that an English quote from the Middle Ages said that "whoever sees a child sees nothing" and pointed out that from all the relevant evidence one can conclude that the child's place in the European Middle Ages was at the last step of social values. From the relevant bibliographic research, it seems that even within the "patriarchal" family, the beating was a widespread means of the child's prudence (1968). During the medieval years, the current theory, which concerned the abusive type of upbringing of children, was included in the Latin saying: *verbis et verberibus* (with words and with beatings), as Karzis (1998) explained.

In medieval societies, which were governed by extreme inequality, a contradictory part of the educational system of the monasteries was that they allowed education to students of poorer social classes, giving them, at the same time, the opportunity to climb, later, to higher or highest ecclesiastical authorities (Melville, 2016). However, it should be noted that this action was aimed only at the prosperity of the church and not society, because as Karzis (1998) pointed out, in medieval times, monasticism was the spiritual support of feudalism.

5. ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THE MEDIEVAL EAST (BYZANTINE EMPIRE)

As the European West collapsed and various barbarian kingdoms sprouted in its territory, the blossom of the Greco-Roman intellect left Rome, Ravenna, Marseilles and other western cultural centers to head to Constantinople, Beirut, Antioch, Alexandria, Athens (Nicol, 1993). The Byzantine educational system functioned for about 11 centuries, inheriting the Hellenistic tradition as the connecting link between ancient and modern Hellenism (Papasotiriou, 2000).

Education in the Byzantine years was so valuable that according to Kourkoules (1948), one who had no education was called "illiterate". However, as shown in relevant books, schooling was not compulsory or public, offered by the state (Michail, 1999; Mullett, 2003) The primary education was known as *propaideia* (beginning at 6 - 8 years old, lasting 3 -4 years) and the school teacher was known as *paidagogos, paidotribes, paidodidaskalos* or *grammatistes* (Karzis, 1998; Antoniadis, 2020). *S*econdary education was known as *enkyklios paideia* (beginning at 12 - 14 years old, lasting at least 4 years) (Antoniadis, 2020). Based on the limited information available, these two educational levels were attended, mainly, by young people from the middle and upper social classes, because their parents could afford the financial cost (Griffin, 2020).

According to the eminent Byzantine scholar Kourkoules (1948), there is insufficient information about the elementary education of children in Byzantium. The only sure finding, through the bibliographic review, is that the Byzantine educational system continued the Hellenistic tradition, almost without differences, while remaining approximately the same, highlighting education and its local characteristics (Papasotiriou, 2000). Elementary education lasted three to four years, while there can be no certainty about the age of starting basic education (2000). However, it seemed that children usually went to school at the age of six to eight (2000). According to Antoniadis (2019), responsible for this education was the *grammatikos/maistor,* while pupils were taught by *ekkritoi tes scholes* ("perfects"). Primary education was usually conducted in courtyards of monasteries or churches (as many of the teachers were from the clergy) while secondary education was conducted in buildings in the city center (Antoniadis, 2020). According to Karzis (1998: 192), in Byzantium, schools of basic education were the *narthexes*, or some rooms in the courtyards of the temples. In addition to the temples and monasteries, there were, also, schools of public orphanages, which operated in many cities and hosted, mainly, children whose fathers had been killed on the battlefield (1998). The percentage of students was minimal in relation to the population and, of course, education, mainly, concerned the boys, as the position of women in Byzantine society was inferior to men (Smelyanski, 2020).

According to the eminent historical researcher Karzis (1998), young students attended classes from morning to afternoon and were taught reading, writing, grammar and arithmetic, while the Psalter was the basic textbook. In addition, Kourkoules (1948) pointed out that the children did a lesson sitting on the floor, since very often the lessons were done outdoors with the students sitting down on the ground, because there was no roof. According to Karzis, (1998), the teacher delivered his lesson sitting on an elevated teacher's throne and was assisted by one of his assistants, a sub-teacher, *ypodidaskalos,* or an elementary teacher, *stoicheiotis* (because he taught the children the first elements, *stoicheia*, of knowledge). With him the students were taught to read syllables and slowly texts, which they should read without mistakes. Pupils would write exercises on *schedaria* (wooden tablets) or *ostraca* using stylus (Antoniadis, 2020).

Holmes and Waring (2003) report that the *Psalter* and the *Octave* were the main textbooks that, in addition to their religious ideological background, offered a pedagogical practice, their melodic reading, which helped young students to memorize. Through this process, some of the children became

aspiring chanters, who, later, would help the teacher - chaplain in his duties. Principal textbooks were the *Iliad* and nine tragedies: *Persians*, *Prometheus Bound*, and *Seven Against Thebes* by Aischylos, *Ajax*, *Electra* and *Oedipus the King* by Sophokles, and *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Women* by Euripides (Antoniadis, 2020). The Bible was another important religious textbook used to teach grammar, according to Griffin (2020). Regarding the teaching of arithmetic, students learned to count and do math operations with their fingers or with small stones, while later, they used the *abacus,* a construction of measuring and performing arithmetic operations (Karzis, 1998).

Unfortunately, in the Byzantine educational system, as well, there seem to be abusive elements in order to punish the students. According to Karzis (1998: 199), the punishments from the teacher for the discipline of the negligent student started from fasting after school, keeping him fasting, until he learned the lesson he did not know, reaching the point of expulsion, when the teacher judged that this student continued not to fulfill his duties. The same historian stated that, in the interval between these two sentences, other abusive punishments prevailed, such as hitting the student's palm with a ruler or a withe, beating and whipping him in the back (1998). In addition, another way of punishing the negligent student was the whole class to spit on him, which was done in a ritual way (1998). Karzis, also, presented a shocking fact that in Byzantine legal texts, the deaths of students from the tortures of their teachers were, also, mentioned, while the law used to forgive a teacher for murder, characterizing him as "involuntary murderer" (1998: 200-201).

6. SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

This study is based on theoretical approaches that concern the term of social justice in education. The way, in which the notion of social justice is perceived changes, in relation to education, according to the socio-economic and political conditions and approaches of each time period (Turhan, 2010). Several years ago, Griffiths (1998) presented the historical frame of the term *"social justice*", stating that during the decades of 1970s and 1980s, the term changed from being focused on social class to including gender and national equality, and, in the 1990s it expanded, covering the issues of sexuality and disability. Gewirtz (1998), also, argues that the concept of justice splits into the "distributive" and the "relational" one. In particular, she argues that social justice should not be used, solely, in the narrow conventional sense of how goods are distributed to society, but should be extended to include all aspects of institutional rules and relationships (1998:469). Social justice is defined in various ways through a variety of other related concepts, such as: equal distribution of resources, equal access, equal opportunities for integration and development (Nastos, 2011). The concept of social justice is constantly changing and expanding, depending on the forthcoming socio-economic and political changes, while it is closely linked to the concept of democracy and its absence is defined as inequality, marginalization and exclusion (Koutselini, 2008).

As Larson and Murtadha (2001) point out, institutions mirror society itself, so putting the school institution at the center of the debate, recognizing diversity and creating the right conditions for addressing it are paramount issues. In the educational frame, justice has been presented in the form of equality in three particular forms. The first form, "equality of opportunity", refers to equality with regard to formal rights, equality of access and equal participation; what is typically called "the common good", which is determined by mutual recognition, respect and a fair distribution of benefits and responsibilities (Griffiths, 2003). The second form, "equality of outcomes", refers to the equality of the success rates of different social groups, through the interference of positive discrimination and affirmative action (Marshall & Ward, 2004). Positive discrimination policies are actions, providing

benefits to social groups that received unequal and unfair treatment, due to their race, disability, gender, etc (2004). Affirmative actions create opportunities for work and education for minority groups, such as government policies, programs and processes, aiming at facilitating minority access to social benefits (Berkovich, 2014). According to Gerwitz (1998), the third version, "equality of condition", emerged from the inability of the previous concepts of distributive justice to face the fundamental problems, arising from the inequality of the wealth and privilege power. It is interpreted as an equality in the living conditions of all members of society (citizens and non – citizens), taking their sexual, racial, gender, religious, sexual heterogeneity into account, (Gewirtz, 1998: 472).

School as an open system, which interacts with the social environment and is determined by it, is called to contribute to the greatest extent to the progress of its less privileged students, by promoting justice, equal treatment and access to knowledge. Therefore, Dantley and Tilman (2010) emphasize the diversity of the definition of social justice through the following two parameters: a) social justice is about recognizing the complexity of the environments that govern education and educational leadership, requiring the deconstruction of political, historical and socio-economic realities to reveal the real ways in which schools deal with diversity and inequality and b) in its various definitions, social justice goes hand in hand with the concept of democracy, as it contains the euphoria of multiple voices and identities.

The first parameter is what determines this essay, since an attempt is made to deconstruct the historical period of the Middle Ages and the difficult position that children had in a society immersed in inequalities. As a result, the medieval elementary educational system was affected by this social reality, treating young students in a particularly harsh and often inhuman way.

7. CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL JUSTICE, AN UNKNOWN CONCEPT TO MEDIEVAL EDUCATION

The submission of all the above information about the medieval educational system, through relevant bibliography, is a testimony of the torturously difficult social conditions which prevailed in the medieval period, regarding the education of young children.

The medieval period is characterized by a complete lack of social justice in all aspects of societies and in all institutional frameworks, as well as in education, as they are haunted by oligarchic and authoritarian state systems. Strong class inequality governs social environments, which are divided into the economically powerful and the poor, whose fate and lives are determined by the former. Access to basic goods, such as knowledge and education, is, also, determined by the financial strength of the few families, thanks to which they have the opportunity to educate their children. In addition to class inequality, medieval societies were also governed by gender inequalities, as boys had the privilege of education, while girls were subject to the male master model. As a result, young girls received a basic education, if they received one, based on learning mainly household chores, so that they could offer their services to the family and be adequate in their marital duties later.

Most shocking of all the above bibliographic information about medieval educational systems is the existence of brutal abusive teaching methods, which took place in religious temples, where sacred religious texts were taught, such as the Bible and the Psalter, which conveyed Jesus' words of love for fellow human beings. Churches and monasteries were transformed into educational institutions, where the acquisition of knowledge was a forced task, framed by teaching methods, which were not child-centered and, certainly, did not promote love and equal treatment of fellow human beings. Students were divided into categories of good and bad students, while negligent students were punished with psychological and physical torture, aiming to level their dignity and self-esteem. The most shock-

ing reality, as presented above in the relevant bibliography, is the existence of such cruelty and brutality on the part of the teachers that led many students not to be able to bear their physical tortures and died.

In short, the entire medieval education system from the West to the East was based on authoritarian teacher-centered approaches, where the child, as a personality and human value, was not only powerless, without having any rights, but, also, extinct. After all, the superiority of the teacher over his students was evident from the structure of the classroom and the fact that the students were sitting on the floor, while the teacher was sitting on a throne, placed on a prominent place to confirm his authority.

According to Rawls (1999), the understanding of justice is based on two principles: a) every individual should have an equal right to the most extensive fundamental freedom, which is compatible with a similar freedom for others, and b) socio-economic inequalities should be arranged in such a way that: i) they bring the greatest profit to the least favored members of a society and ii) there is equal access to social goods for all. Therefore, justice, as a concept, is far from the social perceptions of medieval times. Although ancient Greek civilization seemed to have influenced the medieval educational system and was taught to students, the humanitarian virtues and values of the democratic way of governing, as presented in texts by ancient Greek philosophers, did not inspire the teachers of the medieval era. After all, in the Middle Ages, the curriculum was based on one-dimensional approaches of religious type, which were framed by superstitious and authoritarian views, immersing the people in darkness and inability to develop critical thinking. In this way, social inequality and the brutality of the authoritarian system were perpetuated as socially acceptable values. Therefore, the virtues of social justice, which promoted the humanitarian ideal, were buried deep in the dark minds of the medieval state system.

This work aims to highlight the mistakes of the past as sources of improvement of the social and educational structures of today. It is very important to take the bibliographic sources, which demonstrate oppressive social and educational systems, into account, so that humanity can move forward, stepping on the solid foundations of social justice.

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