



Questioning relationships between children's spirituality and traditions July 24-27, 2018 – Laval University, Quebec – Canada

In the field of spirituality, relationality is commonly examined using four dimensions: relation to self, relation to others, relation to the world and relation to that which transcends all of the above. Spirituality is normally considered to be deeply personal and intimate, its roots being found in a person's innermost life; a claim which applies equally to the spirituality of children. Given its relational character, children's, adolescents' and young adults' spirituality are touched, influenced, and even shaped not only by themselves, but also by those with whom children, adolescents and young adults interact and by the world around them. What influences young people's spirituality and how is that influence exerted? Why and under the influence of whom do children develop their own set of specific values? In a world in which changes occur at an ever increasing pace, where do children find the "marker beacons" on which to refer to in order to build their (spiritual) identity? (Or can they develop spiritually without those markers?) Which foundations are available to them? How does transmission take place and what is actually being handed on to children? These are basic questions in both the world of education and the world of care.

The French encyclopedia *Universalis* states that "the word "tradition" (in Latin *traditio*, the "act of transmitting") comes from the verb *tradere* (to hand on to another, to deliver, to give over)."¹ Alleau and Pépin highlight the fact that tradition cannot be reduced to the "objects" being handed down (facts, customs, doctrines, ideologies or particular institutions). It also involves the "operation" or the process of transmission. Neither is it limited to the pedagogical or ideological; it is also dialectical and ontological. According to these authors, tradition should be understood: "as the mediation and integration of cultures in the various conditions in which they are found in nature; as the revelation of a community to itself through the perpetual "re-creation" of its values; and as the striving for the absolute in one's experiences of the sacred".² Traditions contribute to the construction of

¹ René ALLEAU, Jean PÉPIN, « TRADITION », *Encyclopædia Universalis* [en ligne], consulté le 26 novembre 2015. URL : <http://www.universalis-edu.com/acces.bibl.ulaval.ca/encyclopedie/tradition/>, traduction E. Champagne.

² Id. : « Il importe donc de ressaisir activement l'expérience traditionnelle à travers trois relations fondamentales : en tant que médiation et intégration des cultures dans les conditions variables de la nature, en tant qu'apparition d'une communauté à elle-même à travers la perpétuelle « re-création » de ses valeurs, en tant que visée de l'absolu dans ses rapports avec l'expérience du sacré. »

communities – and of the self – through cultures and shared spiritualities – including religions.

A variety of systemic components of traditions may be highlighted which participate in their constant mutation. These include their “contents”: the knowledge, behavior, wisdom, rituals, stories and worldviews they produce; the environment (market, ethos) in which those contents suggest meanings; the persons who adopt them and live their lives guided by those traditions; the bearers of traditions (elders, wise persons, professionals); the communities in which those contents are shared and shaped, and the institutions which serve as guardians for traditions and provide memoirs of them (including schools and universities); the powers and forces shared among them, and so forth.

Traditions evolve or dramatically transform as well as the communities in which they are rooted and from which they emanate. In the contemporary context of globalisation, the environment in which individuals and communities evolve is highly pluralistic. A basic question remains: which spiritualities are being consolidated or constructed amidst the disappearance and the creation of traditions? If traditions refer to what is being constructed by communities from the current cultural mix, with or without reference to what they consider sacred, what space is allowed for spirituality in those traditions? What types of relationships with the self, others, the world and the transcendent are sustained, affirmed or negated by traditions?

More concretely, traditions can be expressed in music, food, clothing, patterns of interaction and communicating, through rituals, and so forth. Communities and individuals integrate and reinvent themselves constantly in order to answer their needs or to adapt to changing realities. They are also constantly reinterpreting their values and meanings as they evolve over time. Given all this, where is spirituality today? Where is spirituality headed? How can one describe its relationship to time (past, present and future)? How can one describe the relationship between spirituality and traditions: non-existent? Parasitic? Mutual sustenance? What contribution does the interaction of different generations have on traditions and spiritualities? What is the impact of migrations on traditions and spiritualities?

Many questions arise here, concerning a wide range of disciplines and methodologies, all of which have themselves been established within a variety of “traditions”. This problematic will benefit from the competencies and perspectives of a diversity of professionals, who either work directly with children or young people or who carry out research in this field. The aim of the conference is to sustain the inclusive dialogue that has already become a rich tradition shared by the participants of these international conferences on children’s spirituality and by our Faculty.

Québec, February 2017