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CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND FAKE NEWS WITHIN (CRITICAL) RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Abstract

Critical thinking is a set of genuine educational tools for discriminating the fake from the true, the hidden from the transparent and is, as such, at a crucial method for any relevant educational venture within the current in-crisis state of affairs. This paper analyses and presents methods of critical thinking about conspiracy theories involving the COVID-19 vaccination, and fake news on the migration crisis within religious education. The reason for this approach lies in the fact that the Church and religious education in Croatia are relevant social instances. Regarding various conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 vaccination, Vatican released a Note on morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines declaring it to be morally acceptable, if no alternative is available, receiving the vaccine developed from the cell lines derived from tissues obtained from abortion. But, in spite of these efforts, conspiracy theories and fake news prevail. It is, hence, necessary to include more critical thinking tools and methods in the educational system, as proposed by this paper for the purpose of (critical) religious education.

Keywords: COVID-19; religious education; critical thinking; fake news; conspiracy theories.

1. The role of Catholic religious education in the Croatian educational system

For thirty years, the religious education has been a fundamental part of the educational system in Croatia. As a school subject in the field of culture and education, religious education has a special task and undisputable value throughout the entire educational system. This task is an answer to the request for integrated human education¹, and is consistent with the mission and nature of the Catholic Church of proclaiming the Gospel to people of all times. Its mission is carried out in various areas of social life, as well as in the area of public education, especially in parishes and schools as places of education. In this way, the Church fulfils its ministry of service in the area of education and formation.²

By the *Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on the Development of Education and Culture* from 1996, Croatia, in accordance with the principle of freedom of religion, undertook to guarantee the establishment of a Catholic religious education in all public schools, as well as in preschool institutions, as part of the school curriculum and programme.³ Two years later, the Croatian Bishops' Conference published the *Plan and programme of Catholic education in elementary school*.⁴ It was designed to adapt the religious and educational components of content, goals and aims for achieving integrated and comprehensive education. In doing so, the Plan followed the methodology of an open curriculum, seeking a lasting effort of religious teachers in their adaptation and work, special circumstances and needs of pupils/students in different parts and areas of Croatia. In didactic-methodological terms, this meant that with the help of the Programme, the teacher has sufficient knowledge and opportunity of creative work in the realization of educational goals, strategies and methodological approaches that need to be developed.⁵ The last

¹ Cf. Valentina Mandarić, *Odgovorna, kulturna i evangelizacijska dimenzija vjeronauka u školi*, *Kateheza*, 23 (2001.) 1, 5.

² Cf. Nacionalni katehetski ured Hrvatske biskupske konferencije, *Program katoličkog vjeronauka u osnovnoj školi*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2003., 6.

³ Cf. Ugovor o suradnji na području odgoja i kulture, *Hrvatska biskupska konferencija*, in: <https://hbk.hr/ugovor-o-suradnji-na-podrucju-odgoja-i-kulture/> (02.04.2021.), art. 1.

⁴ The Catholic Religious Education programme has undergone several editions. The first program was called: Curriculum of Catholic Religious Education in Primary School, and was published in 1991. Then, in 1998, the Plan and Programme of Catholic Religious Education in Primary School was published, and saw a second edition in 2003, under the name Programme of Catholic Religious Education. In 2006, it was defined according to the Croatian National Education Standard (CNES) and was valid as such until 2019, when the Curriculum for the subject Catholic Religious Education for primary schools and grammar schools in the Republic of Croatia was published. It is currently a valid curriculum for the teaching of Catholic religious education in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia.

⁵ Cf. Nacionalni katehetski ured Hrvatske biskupske konferencije, *Program katoličkog vjeronauka u osnovnoj školi*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 1999., 1-7.

curriculum for primary and secondary school⁶ continues on this path, offering “modern communication and didactic-methodological activities, strategies, approaches and methodological tools in the processes of creative and collaborative learning and teaching.”⁷ An important difference from the previous programme is that emphasis is given to educational outcomes, and not religious content, while the curriculum itself contains recommendations for their implementation. Religious teachers have been given even greater freedom in achieving educational outcomes and estimating for themselves how many school periods they need for a certain outcome.

The Croatian bishops noted that at the heart of religious education is the human person that needs to be promoted in a way that helps children and young people to perceive the religious component as an indispensable factor for their growth in humanity and freedom. Religious education, thus, seeks to help mature the deep *questions of meaning* that young people carry within themselves, showing how the Gospel of Christ provides true and right answers.⁸ The Ministry of Science and Education has focused on critical thinking in its 2019 *Decision on the implementation of the Catholic vocational education curriculum for primary and secondary schools* document.⁹ Among other things, this document states that Catholic religious education contributes to an objective critical approach to life in the face of the phenomena and challenges of the modern world and society, such as the phenomena of migration and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the light of the Catholic faith, religious education enables students to think argumentatively and critically, and to acquire a fundamental knowledge about man, society and the world.¹⁰

2. Critical thinking as a role of religious education

Contemporary education requires an integrated and holistic approach to the whole person. This includes intellectual, spiritual, moral and social dimensions of person, which is, in its intrinsic dignity, the fundamental and basic value of every society. Religious education, as mentioned ear-

⁶ Narodne novine, *Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za nastavni predmet Katolički vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 10/2019.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. O vjeronauku u školi i župnoj katehezi – Poruka hrvatskih biskupa, *Hrvatska biskupska konferencija*, in: <https://hbk.hr/dokumenti-hbk/o-vjeronauku-u-skoli-i-zupnoj-katehezi-poruka-hrvatskih-biskupa/> (03.04.2021.), no. 2.

⁹ Narodne novine, *Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za nastavni predmet Katolički vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 10/2019.

¹⁰ On the importance of critical thinking within the education system, see: Loredana Lombardi, Are you a critical thinker – and can you teach critical thinking to students?, *School Education Gateway*, in: <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/a-critical-thinker-.htm> (02.04.2021.).

lier, is and should be the primary educational locus for achieving this objective and content, where this fundamental value is unquestionably affirmed.¹¹ To be able to achieve this role, we propose incorporation of critical thinking tools into the methodological and didactical means and aids of religious education.

Thinking is the first thing that people need to be taught in schools. After they learn to think properly, they need to learn to think on their own, and not just for themselves but for the community as well. Proper thinking implies thinking with understanding, as opposed to thinking and learning by heart. Learning sheer facts to merely be reproduced later does not involve proper thinking. Proper thinking leans on thinking and learning by heart, but also introduces understanding and theological structure of both the learning and thinking processes. It is analogue with faith – how it is passed down to new generations (memorised), how it is taught (by “religious logic”) and how young people are initiated into the faith. The present analogy is, thus, drawn between the initiation into faith in three phases¹² and introduction of critical thinking into the educational process. While initiation ends with internalized faith, education yields the acquisition of critical competences.

There are three fundamental assumptions concerning critical thinking: it is reflective, reasonable and responsible. When we say that critical thinking is reflective, what first comes to mind is the data or information that is the content of reflection. All relevant and important information about a topic that we wish to approach critically need, therefore, to be included. Said information can be found in various places, but it is important to try to be objective as much as possible. This information will later be the material for analysis, which assumes reason. Critical thinking is, consequently, reasonable – we are looking and searching for reasons using the reasons we have in mind. The reasons that we are searching for concern the relevant and important information we reflect upon. We need to receive and approach it critically – to frame it contextually within the relevant knowledge we possess. In other words, we need to understand this information. When we do, critical thinking is responsible for making an informed decision about the reasons found.¹³ The reason present in mind when embarking on this critical adventure with the relevant infor-

¹¹ Cf. Valentina Mandarić, *Odgojna, kulturna i evangelizacijska dimenzija vjeronauka u školi*, 5-17.

¹² These three phases refer to: (1) learning by heart; (2) learning religious logic and (3) internalization of religious content within the individual and incorporation of that individual into the religious community. This is noticeable in the sacramental structure of the Christian initiation process that starts with Baptism, proceeds with Eucharist and ends with Confirmation.

¹³ This can be seen as contextually coherent with the earlier mentioned sacramental structure of Christian initiation where in Confirmation young Catholics make an informed decision about reason (Eucharist) that they were taught and that they now understand.

mation, data and reasons, is and should be the true knowledge that one can arrive at and realize.

Since the main objective and aim of religious education is truth itself, it seems reasonable to include critical thinking more significantly in the methodological and didactical corpus of religious education. Especially so since it can be even theologically justified and grounded in the sacramental structure of Christian initiation. Critical thinking is a set of genuine educational tools for discriminating the fake from the true, the hidden from the transparent and is, as such, a necessary method for any relevant educational venture within the current in-crisis state of affairs. Critical thinking is “an essential skill because it helps individuals and groups analyse problems with efficiency and speed, and identifies potential risks that are not explicit.”¹⁴ We need to equip students with tools and methods that will help them to think properly and critically about the world. The main critical thinking tools are already well known. Here we propose: critical survey questionnaire; personal testimony; media analysis and thought experiments when concerning fake news; and: Occam’s razor; blended learning and reverse engineering when conspiracy theories are in question.

3. Suggestions of some critical thinking tools in religious education regarding fake news and conspiracy theories

Here we introduce a short analysis of the phenomenon of fake news about the migrant crisis, and various conspiracy theories about COVID-19. The idea is to propose critical thinking tools for the implementation of these topics into Catholic religious education. When incorporated into religious education, these critical thinking tools slightly change the nature of religious education, turning it into a more critical mode and role within the overall educational system.

3.1. False news and objective journalism in the context of the migration crisis

When the shipwreck of North African refugees took 250 human lives near Lampedusa¹⁵ in 2013, it took two years for European politicians and media to realize the threat of the migrant crisis that took its peak in 2015. In the search for a better life and secure future, more than a mil-

¹⁴ Viola Makhzoum and Mazen Jabboru, Critical Thinking and its Role in Facing Coronavirus, *International Journal of Educational Research Review*, 5 (2020.) 4, 389.

¹⁵ Cf. *Stravična tragedija: Potonuo brod s 250 migranata, deseci mrtvih*, in: <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/svijet/kod-sicilije-potonuo-brod-s-najmanje-200-ljudi---306785.html> (02.04.2021.).

lion refugees¹⁶ tried to enter Europe. The European leaders undertook to organize conferences and formal political events to find a just and universal European solution for migrants and refugees, but nothing happened. To illustrate, the Dublin III Regulation demonstrated ineffectiveness in responding to such a situation, pointing to structural failures and numerous shortcomings in its implementation. The result of all this was the European migration crisis.¹⁷

This phenomenon soon became a major issue in public and media discourse. The question of interest here is how the media viewed and represented the immigrants who were still arriving to merge with the European public. Some broadcasters or portals openly expressed their own views on reporting the news about the migrant crisis. It is the political and ideological worldview of the media that decides on the headlines when reporting on migrants. Sead Alić explains that media manipulation always contains a dose of truth, which is then shaped in the desired way.¹⁸ For example, the killing of British soldier Lee Rigby in the streets of London really happened¹⁹, but the overemphasis on the perpetrators and a series of subsequent articles on the religion of the refugees arrived left a feeling of Islamophobia in European citizens. The influence of the media was also felt in the attitude of some Catholic believers who watched the whole situation with fear and insecurity, consequently not witnessing solidarity, mercy or the somewhat forgotten virtue of Christian hospitality.²⁰

In order to develop objective and ethical journalism, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) has joined the fight against media manipulation by publishing “*Eight media kits for dealing with the migrant crisis.*”²¹ The number one piece of advice for each journalist is to collect data as

¹⁶ According to a report by the International Migration Organisation, one million new immigrants entered Europe by the end of 2015, while Eurostat recorded 1.7 million asylum applications. Of these, 555,761 immigrants were in Croatia. Cf. John Cosgrave, Karen Hargrave, Marta Foresti i dr., *Europe's refugees and migrants*, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2006., 28; Prosinac 2015: Obavijest o prihvatu i smještaju migranata u RH, *Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova*, in: <https://policija.gov.hr/podrska-zajednici/migranti/arhiva-obavijesti-o-prihvatu-i-smjestaju-migranata-u-rh-po-mjesecima/prosinac-2015-obavijest-o-prihvatu-i-smjestaju-migranata-u-rh/398> (02.04.2021.).

¹⁷ The European migration crisis is the name for the period of intensive migration of Asian and African refugees to Europe between 2015 and 2019. The crisis manifested itself in the inability of the European Union's policy to respond to the situation in a timely and suitable manner.

¹⁸ Cf. Sead Alić, *Mediji. Od zavodenja do manipuliranja*, AGM, Zagreb, 2009., 114-115.

¹⁹ *Murder of Lee Rigby*, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Lee_Rigby (02.04. 2021.).

²⁰ On the issue of violence in the context of the European migration crisis, see: Darko Rapić and Šimun Bilokapić, *Nasilje u kontekstu europske migracijske krize, Služba Božja*, 60(2020.)2, 133-159.

²¹ Cf. *8 tips for migration coverage*, in: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2016/11/28/8-practical-tips-for-migration-coverage/> (02.04.2021.).

accurately as possible. Another important tip is to use the correct terminology not to misinform the public. The EFJ has also called for the correction of misrepresented and stereotyped images on migrants. The fact is that these people, and especially children, are exhausted, hungry and in need of help.

3.2. Some suggestions for a critical approach to religious education on migration and fake news

Within the Curriculum for the subject of Catholic religious education for primary and grammar schools in the Republic of Croatia, there is not a single educational outcome that would directly relate to the topic of migration, migrants and refugees. However, within the educational outcomes of primary and secondary Catholic education, we can find those outcomes that directly or indirectly relate to migrant issues.²² The outcomes need not be directly related to the topic of migration as every religious teacher can find an opportunity to discuss migrants with each designated class within the given educational outcomes.

For example, the religious education curriculum for the second grade of primary school foresees the following educational outcome: “The pupil presents and describes the basic experiences of him-/herself, others and the world in which (s)he sees the bright and dark sides” (Elementary school KV A.2.1.), with the same outcome which says: “The pupil easily describes examples of the bright and dark sides of life from his or her own experience, recognizes the connection of certain behaviours and their consequences in relation to others. The pupil recognizes and describes situations from his or her environment in which it is seen how people are interconnected and responsible for the created world. The pupil suggests ways to help others in his or her environment and provides concrete help.”²³ Also, the Curriculum of Catholic Religious Education for high school juniors, defines the annual educational outcome as follows: “The student explains the Christian conceptualisation of man in the image of God. The student analyses the Christian conceptualisation of man as man and woman. The student analyses the depictions of men and women in contemporary society (media, society). The student cites negative impacts on the dignity of men and women.”²⁴

Every student wants the educational content to be interesting and applicable in real life, which is why the religious teacher must be well pre-

²² Cf. Mihael Prović, *Izazov solidarnosti i mogućnosti vjerskog odgoja srednjoškolaca u Republici Hrvatskoj pred fenomenom migracijske krize u Europskoj uniji*, *Crkva u svijetu*, 55 (2020.) 3, 651.

²³ Narodne novine, *Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za nastavni predmet Katolički vjeronauk za osnovne škole i gimnazije u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 10/2019.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

pared for each topic.²⁵In the context of fake news and migration, several ideas can be proposed, in principle, for religious education. The religious teacher can prepare a survey questionnaire or group work to test the current attitudes of religious students toward migrants and refugees, and then discuss the results and refer to the Gospel. If possible, the religious teacher can bring a migrant or a refugee to class to give a testimony of his or her journey and life, in order to overcome stereotypes. In secondary schools, where religious students are better capacitated for critical thinking, the religious teacher can prepare media materials (video, audio or print-outs) about migrants and refugees. The task before the students would be to prove the (in)credibility of the content and the received information, i.e., to critically analyse the media information, while the role of the religious teacher is to explain how to recognize false and manipulative news.²⁶Another approach to media materials that can easily show how fake news are easily made, and a task for students could be to create (fake) news based on a manipulated media image. In this way, students learn effectively and from experience not to believe everything they read or see on the social media. Finally, the religious teacher can do a (thought) experiment on their own or with students, in which false news will be spread at the class or school level, and then monitor its consequences.

3.3. Conspiracy theories about COVID-19 pandemic

What takes for the world to stop? This rhetorical question was left unanswered until recently, when the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the WHO declared a global pandemic caused by a respiratory zoonotic virus that arose from bats in natural settings. The whole story started in Wuhan, China, and, in just months, the virus spread globally. Politicians responded by a lockdown – economic, societal and territorial closure of countries while enormous financial resources were directed toward big pharmaceutical companies. By the end of 2020, a handful of pharmaceutical companies declared to have developed the vaccine thus bringing the global pandemic to a close. But the situation is not so simple, and the global pandemic shows no signs of stopping. One of the many problems concerns vaccine distribution, showing that European solidarity²⁷is in a crisis. The other reasons why people distrust the political leadership and scientific community are conspiracy theories about the pandemic.

²⁵ The following detailed research sees how important school religious education is present in the lives of young people: Josip Šimunović, Utjecaj školskog vjeronauka na život mladih danas, *Kateheza*, 23 (2001.) 2, 134-149.

²⁶ For details on recognizing fake news, see: Tatjana Krpan Mofardin, Kako prepoznati lažne vijesti, *Knjžničar/Knjžničarka*, 9 (2018.) 9, 67-75.

²⁷ Cf. Bruno Petrušić, Kriza europsolidarnosti, *Riječki teološki časopis*, 40 (2012.) 2, 351-364.

A conspiracy theory is an (narrative) explanation for an event or situation that invokes a conspiracy by sinister and powerful groups, mainstream media misinformation and some hidden variables of influential stakeholders. Very often these narrative explanations present an alternative history and facts about events, people and a certain media presentation of the event in question. Though it creates an alternative explanation based on some true events, it, mainly has a life of its own that also includes history and an inherent logic reinforced by circular reasoning.

The first and most important conspiracy theory that we present here concerns the origin of the virus. In this narrative, the virus had escaped from a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan, hence, this is a case of a man-made – rather than naturally emerged – virus, with an agenda of creating a new world order. This new world order is, in itself, a conspiracy theory, living a rich and fruitful life. Only, this time it has incorporated the COVID-19 pandemic in its narrative. Proponents of this conspiracy theory hold that there really exist a small group of people that rule the entire world: international institutions, political governments and worldwide economies. One of them is, apparently, billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates, exploiting this pandemic to microchip the worldwide population and establish population control. The idea behind is that this small group, led by Gates, wants to control the global population through vaccine. Other conspiracy theories also fit within this new-world-order narrative: 5G technology, (Chinese) hostile takeover of the world economy, American presidential elections (Donald Trump was one of the major sources of “raw materials” for conspiracy theorists) on virtually every level of society.

There is, though, one conspiracy theory that interests us more than others because it directly affects the moral teaching of the Catholic Church and it concerns the vaccine developed from the cell lines derived from a foetus aborted in 1970s. This issue was so important that the Vatican released a *Note on morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines*²⁸, declaring it to be morally acceptable, if no alternative is available, to receive the vaccine developed from the cell lines derived from the tissues obtained from the two foetuses that had been aborted.

3.4. Critical thinking tools in religious education on the subject of conspiracy theories

Dealing with conspiracy theories requires a lot of patience and persistence. When involved in a conspiracy theory discussion, one needs to indicate and point out the unjustifiability of the background assumptions

²⁸ Cf. Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, *Note on morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines*, in: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-antiCOVID_en.html (14.04.2021.).

and logically incoherent content of these narratives. This requires more time and knowledge for religious education teachers, which is why this paper offers three critical thinking tools as form of help in their work.

Occam's razor is a familiar critical thinking tool within philosophy and theology. In short, it instructs not to multiply entities beyond necessity. When dealing with alternative explanations, give preference to the simpler one – to the one that answers more questions instead of creating new ones. When applied to this issue of conspiracy theories, Occam's razor enables students to see incoherence within a conspiracy theory narrative. This tool can be used in different ways. The first approach focuses on its simple application in alternative narratives – one created by mainstream and the other by obscure conspiracy theorists. The other application is engaging students in the production of alternative narratives, providing them all needed recourses. One group of students would have to create a normal narrative about one simple event, and the other an alternative narrative about the same simple event but using alternative facts, events and explanations. This exercise will show students how easy it is to produce alternative narratives, but also how hard it is, at the same time, to create a narrative that is coherent.

Blended learning²⁹ is a learning model that combines traditional forms of teaching, online learning, group discussion and critical thinking in general. It is used to incorporate various, namely online, sources of information aimed to build a student's character and critical approach. The application of this model implies responding to critically formed questions about background assumptions regarding some narrative explanations, followed by investigating alternatives. It can be applied to various texts, such as newspaper articles, blog posts as well as YouTube videos and social media discussions.

The last critical thinking tool proposed here for the purpose of critical religious education is reverse engineering.³⁰ This tool is used in many fields, especially in the STEM area and IT fields, but is uncommon in religious education methodological settings. As the name says, this is engineering that has been reversed. It includes and develops logical thinking competences and analytical skills in students. Applied to the topic of conspiracy theories, it includes analytical examination of the presented narrative: gaining insight into its logical construction and fundamental assumptions, while deconstructing the presented narrative into smaller logical parts from which the students, then get the task of combining another, alternative narrative using the same smaller parts and elements. Using these and other tools of critical thinking equips students with crit-

²⁹ Cf. Sandy Ariawan, Building Critical Thinking in COVID-19 Pandemic Era: Impossible or I am Possible?, *Jurnal on advanced science HuB*, 6 (2020.) 2, 127.

³⁰ Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's dangerous idea. Evolution and the meanings of life*, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 1995., 212-228.

ical competences and skills. At the same time, they learn relevant and important information, they learn to see and search for logical coherence as an important element of a truthful narrative or explanation of a phenomenon, event or fact. And this exactly is the main goal and objective of (critical) religious education: truthful knowledge about the world, society and man.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary education requires an integrated and holistic approach to the whole person within the contextual framework that can be described as a pluralistic and multi-levelled contemporary society. Here we claim that religious education can and should be the main ingredient of this approach. The religious teacher has been given an even greater freedom in achieving educational outcomes and estimating for themselves how many school periods they need for a certain outcome. This obliges the religious teacher to equip their students with tools and methods that will help them think properly and critically about the world. Here an analogy is drawn between a three-phase initiation into faith and introduction of critical thinking into the educational process. While initiation ends with internalized faith, education results in the acquisition of critical competences. There are three fundamental assumptions concerning critical thinking: it is reflective, reasonable and responsible.

Within the Curriculum for the subject of Catholic religious education for primary and grammar schools in the Republic of Croatia, there is not a single educational outcome that would directly relate to the topics of migration, migrants and refugees, or conspiracy theories, for that matter. However, some of the educational outcomes of primary and secondary Catholic education indirectly relate to these issues. Consequently, there is no need for the outcomes to be directly related to these topics, because the religious teacher can, within the given educational outcomes, find an opportunity for each class to talk about them. This paper presents and proposes some critical thinking tools that can be easily incorporated in the religious education in the Croatian context: survey questionnaire or group work, personal testimony, media materials (articles, posts, news, social media...), study case (creating own fake news) and thought experiments, Occam's razor, blended learning and reverse engineering. All these tools for critical thinking can and should be included in the religious education as this very school subject has the potential of giving relevant answers to the request for integrated human education. The main goal of including these critical thinking tools into religious education teaching should be to enable students to be reflective, reasonable and responsible members of our society.

TEORIJE ZAVJERE I LAŽNE VIJESTI UNUTAR (KRITIČKOG) VJERONAUKA

Sažetak

Kritičko mišljenje skup je obrazovnih alata za razlikovanje lažnog od istinitog, skrivenog od transparentnog te je kao takvo ključna metoda za svaki relevantan obrazovni pothvat unutar trenutnog stanja krize. Ovaj rad analizira i prikazuje metode kritičkog promišljanja teorija zavjere o cijepljenju protiv COVID-19 i lažnih vijesti o migracijskoj krizi unutar vjeronauka. Razlog ovakvog pristupa leži u činjenici da su Crkva i vjeronauk u Hrvatskoj relevantne društvene instance. Što se tiče različitih teorija zavjere o cijepljenju protiv COVID-19, Vatikan je objavio bilješku o moralnosti korištenja nekih cjepiva protiv COVID-19, proglašavajući da je moralno prihvatljivo, ako nema alternative, primiti cjepiva razvijenih iz staničnih linija dobivenih iz tkiva pobačene djece. Unatoč tim naporima, danas prevladavaju teorije zavjere i lažne vijesti. Stoga je potrebno u odgojno-obrazovni sustav uključiti više alata i metoda kritičkog mišljenja, kako je predloženo u ovom radu u svrhu (kritičke) vjeronauke.

Ključne riječi: COVID-19, vjeronauk, kritičko mišljenje, lažne vijesti, teorije zavjere.