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Religious Education, Psychosocial Learning, and the Formation of Prosocial Behaviour: A Conceptual Study in Christian Educational Contexts

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Abstract

This article examines the role of psychosocial learning in the formation of prosocial behaviour within Christian religious education and broader religiously informed educational settings. While prosocial behaviour is frequently analysed from psychological, pedagogical, or sociological perspectives, less attention has been paid to the ways in which religious education contributes to the internalisation of prosocial dispositions through moral formation, role modelling, community life, and reflective experiential learning. The aim of this conceptual study is to analyse how selected principles of social learning theory, particularly observational learning, modelling, self-regulation, and reflective experience, can be interpreted within the context of Christian educational practice. The study draws on the pedagogical, psychological, and religious-educational literature and focuses on three formative environments: the family, peer groups, and structured social-psychological or pastoral training. The analysis suggests that religious education can provide a significant framework for cultivating empathy, solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, and altruistic concern for others. The article argues that psychosocial learning, when embedded in religious and moral education, represents an important pathway for the development of prosocial competencies and for the formation of socially responsible persons in contemporary pluralistic societies.

Keywords: religious education; Christian pedagogy; prosocial behaviour; psychosocial learning; moral formation; social learning theory; pastoral education



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1. Introduction

Education is widely regarded as a fundamental mechanism of socialisation through which societies shape individual development. Socialisation is mediated by families, educators, peer groups, religious communities, and educational institutions. Within this broader process, education constitutes a structured and intentional form of influence that shapes individuals' attitudes, values, and patterns of behaviour. Procházka describes socialisation as a lifelong process through which individuals internalise forms of behaviour and action, knowledge, language, values, and culture, thereby becoming integrated into society (Procházka 2012, p. 90). Socialisation can thus be understood as a dynamic interaction

between individuals and their social environments, through which behavioural norms, value orientations, and cultural patterns are progressively acquired.

From the perspective of contemporary psychosocial and pedagogical approaches, education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge. Rather, it is a broader formative process that intentionally supports individual development within a social environment. Šafránková accordingly characterises education as a deliberate and purposeful process that facilitates individual change and development in relation to personal needs, individual dispositions, and social relationships (Šafránková 2011, p. 42). This understanding emphasises the developmental and transformative character of education, which seeks to cultivate not only intellectual competencies but also social and moral dispositions.

Such a broad understanding of education is particularly relevant to religious education. Religious education does more than transmit doctrinal knowledge or cultural information about religion; it also contributes to the formation of values, attitudes, relationships, and patterns of conduct. Within Christian educational traditions, the formation of the person is closely connected with questions of meaning, responsibility, moral orientation, and relationships with God and others. Religious education may therefore be understood as a distinctive formative environment in which the social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of human development intersect.

Across different historical periods, the content and aims of education have reflected both the needs of society and the prevailing philosophical, cultural, and religious frameworks within which educational thought developed. Educational ideals have consequently evolved in response to broader social and intellectual changes while continuing to emphasise moral formation and social responsibility (Krupa 2022, pp. 160–69; Judák 2021, pp. 14–25). From this perspective, education has never been limited to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It has also served as a means of cultivating the human person and preparing individuals for responsible participation in social and communal life.

Contemporary educational discourse has devoted increasing attention to approaches that foster prosocial attitudes and socially responsible behaviour. These approaches emphasise the role of education in developing empathy, cooperation, solidarity, and altruistic engagement (Kondrla et al. 2022, pp. 149–59; Hamarová et al. 2024a, pp. 138–47). Such aims are also central to religious education when it is understood as a process of moral and spiritual formation. From a Christian perspective, prosocial behaviour is not merely a socially desirable competence; it also expresses responsibility for others, respect for human dignity, and a commitment to solidarity and service. Religious education can contribute to its development by providing a value-oriented framework in which prosocial attitudes are connected with moral convictions, religious narratives, communal practices, and personal responsibility.

The formation of prosocial behaviour is closely associated with psychosocial learning. Individuals acquire social and moral competencies not only through direct instruction but also through observation, imitation, identification with significant others, participation in social groups, and reflection on lived experience. In religious and educational contexts, these processes occur within families, peer communities, educational environments, pastoral programmes, and structured social-psychological training. Such settings provide opportunities for individuals to encounter, practise, reflect upon, and gradually internalise prosocial patterns of behaviour.

This article analyses the role of psychosocial learning in the formation of prosocial behaviour within Christian religious education, understood broadly to include religiously informed formative settings beyond formal schooling. It examines how mechanisms of social learning can contribute to the development of empathy, cooperation, solidarity, altruism, and responsibility for others. Particular attention is given to natural social groups,

especially families and peer communities, as well as to structured educational programmes, pastoral initiatives, and social-psychological training. By relating psychosocial learning to religious education, the article seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary reflection on moral formation, prosociality, and the educational role of religion in contemporary society.

Methodological note

This article is a conceptual and theoretical study based on a purposive review and qualitative synthesis of the relevant scholarly literature in religious education, pedagogy, psychology, and social learning theory. Sources were selected on the basis of their conceptual relevance to psychosocial learning and prosocial formation in Christian educational contexts. The study does not seek to test empirical hypotheses or provide a systematic review of all of the available literature; rather, it integrates relevant theoretical perspectives and identifies interdisciplinary connections that clarify the role of psychosocial learning in religious formation. Its conclusions are therefore interpretative and are not intended to be empirically generalisable. Formal school-based religious education is not examined in detail because its institutional position and curricular role differ substantially across national contexts. The analysis focuses instead on natural social groups and on structured pastoral, educational, and social-psychological programmes.

2. Religious Education and Psychosocial Learning in Prosocial Formation

Reflection on the relationship between education and moral formation can be traced back to classical antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the work of Plato, conceived of education as a process directed towards the cultivation of the human soul and the pursuit of the highest moral values. The idea of the good occupies a central position in Plato's philosophy, while wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice constitute essential dimensions of moral development. Education was therefore understood as an integrated process combining intellectual formation with physical, aesthetic, and moral development (Blašíková and Nemec 2023).

Roman philosophy likewise contributed to an understanding of education as a process of ethical cultivation. The Stoic philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca regarded education as a means of guiding individuals towards wisdom, virtue, and a morally responsible life. From this perspective, its ultimate purpose was not the pursuit of transient pleasure but the attainment of inner freedom and practical wisdom through ethical self-cultivation (Šarníková 2022; Hlad 2021, pp. 176–90). Greek and Roman educational thought thus established an enduring ideal of harmonious human development, combining intellectual reflection, moral formation, and the cultivation of character traits necessary for responsible participation in society.

With the consolidation of Christian educational traditions during the Middle Ages, theological understandings of the human person became increasingly influential in conceptions of moral and prosocial formation (Máhrík et al. 2024, pp. 34–43; Plašíenková and Farbák 2020, pp. 227–52). These traditions are grounded in a worldview that understands human life in relation to God, the spiritual dimension of the person, and a transcendent moral horizon (Maturkanič et al. 2023, pp. 20–32; Kondrla et al. 2024a, pp. 73–84; Luft and Veverková 2023, pp. 741–42). Education within this framework is not confined to the development of intellectual abilities but encompasses the formation of the whole person in relation to God, other people, and the moral order. Numerous Christian thinkers have explored this relationship between education and moral formation, although a comprehensive account of their contributions lies beyond the scope of the present study (Šuráb et al. 2024, pp. 126–39; Maturkanič et al. 2022, pp. 106–24).

Giovanni Bosco, the founder of the Salesian movement, provides a particularly influential example of this Christian educational tradition in practice. Bosco developed an approach to the moral and social formation of disadvantaged young people based on trust, care, and the active presence of educators in their lives. His preventive system rejected predominantly punitive methods and instead emphasised supportive relationships between educators and learners. Within nineteenth-century Catholic pedagogy, the Salesian approach combined humanistic educational principles with religious values (Jůva 2003). Its significance for prosocial formation lies in its demonstration that religious education is enacted not only through instruction but also through relational practice, preventive care, and the cultivation of responsibility for others.

Further perspectives on the relationship between education and prosocial development emerged within reform pedagogy. Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical pedagogy, for example, emphasises holistic education, the development of individual potential, and the cultivation of empathy and social responsibility (Kondrla et al. 2024b, pp. 120–29; Adam 2025, pp. 132–43). Jan Neuman, writing in the context of outdoor and experiential education, presents Kurt Hahn's pedagogy as an approach that emphasises personal experience, physical activity, cooperation, and service to others as components of moral and social formation (Neuman 2011, p. 57). Hahn argued that participation in service, cooperative activities, and challenging outdoor experiences could strengthen empathy, responsibility, and resilience among young people (Neuman 2011; Hahn 2011). Together, these pedagogical traditions illustrate that prosocial formation cannot be achieved through verbal instruction alone; it also requires lived experience, social interaction, practice, and reflection.

Within contemporary educational theory, prosocial behaviour generally refers to voluntary action intended to benefit another person or group (Slaměník et al. 2019). It encompasses behaviours such as giving, sharing, cooperating, comforting, and responding empathetically to the needs of others. Prosocial behaviour is therefore a broad category and does not necessarily presuppose an entirely selfless motivation. In religious education, it can be understood both as a social competence and as a practical expression of moral and spiritual formation. It manifests an individual's ability to recognise the needs of others and respond through care, solidarity, and responsible action.

The scholarly literature identifies numerous forms of prosocial behaviour, including charitable giving, expressions of sympathy and understanding, instrumental assistance, cooperation, and supportive action that helps others achieve their goals or overcome difficulties (Slaměník et al. 2019; Petrovič et al. 2024; Sedláček 2012; Sedláček and Šišovský 2011). These forms of conduct are particularly relevant to Christian religious education because they correspond to such central values as compassion, mercy, solidarity, and service. Religious education can provide an interpretive and value-oriented framework within which prosocial actions become part of a broader moral commitment to others.

Altruism is closely related to prosocial behaviour but represents a more specific concept. It refers to action intended to benefit others and motivated primarily by concern for their well-being rather than by an expectation of personal gain (Slaměník et al. 2019). Although all altruistic acts are prosocial, not all prosocial acts are necessarily altruistic, since prosocial conduct may also be influenced by expectations of reciprocity, social approval, or other personal benefits. Altruism is therefore commonly contrasted with egoism and associated with actions such as helping, volunteering, charitable giving, and self-sacrificial service.

Several theoretical approaches seek to explain altruistic behaviour. Evolutionary accounts employ concepts such as kin selection to explain why individuals may assist relatives with whom they share genetic material. Social exchange theory interprets helping as a form of interaction that may produce long-term social benefits, including stronger rela-

tionships, reciprocity, or an enhanced social reputation (Hamarová et al. 2024b, pp. 25–33). Empathy-based approaches, by contrast, associate altruistic action with the capacity to recognise and respond to the experiences and suffering of others (Mlčák and Zašková 2007). Religious education adds a moral and theological dimension to these explanations by relating altruism to self-giving love, service, and responsibility towards vulnerable persons.

Altruism is regarded as a moral virtue in many cultural and religious traditions and is cultivated through education and socialisation. Its development begins in childhood, as individuals gradually learn to recognise the needs, perspectives, and experiences of others. In Christian educational contexts, this process may be supported by religious narratives, rituals, moral exemplars, and communal practices that foster sensitivity and responsibility towards other persons. Altruism is thus not merely an individual psychological disposition; it is also a socially and culturally mediated value that can be strengthened within religiously shaped environments.

Psychosocial learning provides a conceptual framework for explaining how such values and patterns of conduct are acquired. It belongs to the broader family of social and social-cognitive learning approaches, which emphasise the interaction of social experience, observation, cognition, and behaviour in the development of social competencies. Albert Bandura's social learning theory is especially influential in this regard because it highlights observational learning, modelling, perceived self-efficacy, and self-regulation as important mechanisms of behavioural development.

Bandura's principle of reciprocal determinism describes the continuous interaction between personal factors, behaviour, and the social environment. His account of observational learning further proposes that individuals acquire patterns of behaviour not only through direct experience but also by observing the actions of others and their consequences (Bandura 1977). Within religious education, learners may therefore internalise prosocial conduct by observing parents, educators, catechists, pastoral workers, peers, and members of religious communities whose actions embody empathy, solidarity, and responsibility.

Symbolic representation enables individuals to retain observed experiences, anticipate possible actions and consequences, and organise their behaviour through internal cognitive models (Bandura 1977, p. 59). Perceived self-efficacy—the belief that one is capable of performing a particular action successfully—influences whether an individual attempts and persists in prosocial conduct (Bandura 1977). Self-regulation enables individuals to evaluate and modify their behaviour in relation to internalised standards and social expectations (Petrovič et al. 2023, pp. 99–114). Moral exemplars and other significant social figures are especially important within these processes because their conduct provides observable and credible models for others (Fil'a et al. 2024, pp. 231–41). Christian religious education therefore communicates moral values not only through explicit teaching but also through personal example, communal practice, participation, and reflection on experience.

The relationship between religious education, psychosocial learning, and prosocial formation is central to the argument of this article. Religious education provides the value-oriented and interpretive framework within which prosocial behaviour can be understood as an aspect of moral and spiritual development. Psychosocial learning identifies the mechanisms through which such behaviour is observed, practised, reflected upon, internalised, and reinforced. Prosocial formation denotes the gradual development of dispositions such as empathy, cooperation, altruism, solidarity, and responsibility for others. This conceptual relationship provides the basis for the following analysis of natural social groups and structured training environments as contexts of prosocial learning.

3. Natural Social Groups as Environments of Prosocial Formation

Natural social groups constitute important environments for the development of prosocial behaviour. They differ in duration, social significance, internal structure, and the roles occupied by their members. Although individuals participate in numerous groups throughout their lives, those encountered during childhood and adolescence are particularly formative because they provide some of the earliest contexts in which attitudes, values, and patterns of social conduct are learned and practised. The present study therefore focuses on the family and peer groups as primary environments for the development of prosocial dispositions during these stages of life.

The family is the first and generally the most influential natural social group in an individual's life. Giddens and Pierson define it as a group of people connected by kinship ties in which adult members assume responsibility for raising children (Giddens and Pierson 1998, p. 54). Within the family, prosocial behaviour develops through everyday relationships and interactions in which children encounter and gradually internalise the conduct modelled by other family members. In religiously shaped families, this process may also involve the transmission of moral and spiritual values through prayer, narratives, rituals, shared practices, and concrete examples of care for others.

From the perspective of individual psychology, Adler emphasised the formative role of the family environment in the development of an individual's lifestyle (Kohútová et al. 2021). In Adler's account, lifestyle is shaped by personal goals, self-understanding, emotional attitudes towards others, and an individual's interpretation of the world. Family structure and the constellation into which a child is born are among its significant environmental influences. Developing primarily during early childhood, lifestyle emerges from the interaction of heredity, environment, social interest, and the individual's creative capacities (Adler 2020). Within this framework, social interest—or social feeling—is especially relevant to prosocial behaviour because it involves the development of belonging, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility towards others.

The family consequently functions as a primary environment for cultivating prosocial dispositions such as empathy, altruism, cooperation, sharing, respect, and social responsibility. These dispositions are transmitted largely through psychosocial learning mechanisms embedded in everyday family interactions. In families shaped by religious values, their development may be further supported by a moral vocabulary of responsibility, forgiveness, solidarity, and service. This vocabulary enables children to interpret particular acts of care as expressions of a broader moral and religious orientation.

Socialisation within the family operates through several interconnected mechanisms, including social activity, imitation, identification, and suggestion (Jiříšková and Medziorský 2023). Imitation and identification are particularly significant for the development of prosocial behaviour. Their importance demonstrates that moral and social learning occurs not only through explicit instruction but also through participation in relationships and observation of significant others.

Imitation is the process through which individuals reproduce behaviour observed in others. During childhood, parents, siblings, and other family members frequently serve as models whose behaviour children imitate selectively in accordance with their age, experience, and cognitive development. Identification is a deeper process through which individuals adopt not only observable patterns of conduct but also the values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with a significant person or group. Suggestion involves the relatively unreflective acceptance of attitudes or behavioural patterns communicated by persons who possess authority or occupy an influential position within the family or another reference group. Together, these mechanisms help explain how prosocial dispositions can become embedded in an individual's developing moral orientation.

The development of prosocial attitudes is also affected by the family's overall value orientation and relational climate. A family environment characterised by mutual support, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility for others provides regular opportunities for children to encounter and practise prosocial conduct. A shared religious or spiritual orientation may provide additional narratives, symbols, practices, and moral exemplars through which these experiences are interpreted. The family can thus be understood as a complex environment of moral, social, and religious learning rather than merely as a setting in which behavioural rules are explicitly communicated.

Alongside the family, peer groups constitute another important natural social environment for the development of prosocial competencies. Such groups may arise spontaneously or take more organised forms, and they allow members to occupy different roles and positions within a social structure. They function as both membership and reference groups, influencing how individuals interpret and internalise social norms and patterns of behaviour. For children and adolescents, peer communities are often settings in which values acquired in the family and other educational environments are tested, confirmed, modified, or challenged.

The development of prosocial behaviour within peer groups is closely connected with observational learning. According to Bandura's social learning theory, individuals can acquire behavioural patterns by observing both the actions of others and the consequences of those actions (Bandura 1977). Observed consequences influence whether a modelled behaviour is subsequently reproduced. When helping, cooperation, solidarity, or moral courage receives positive recognition within a peer group, members may become more likely to adopt similar forms of conduct. Conversely, group norms that reward aggression, exclusion, or indifference may inhibit prosocial development.

Prosocial formation within peer groups therefore depends not only on individual dispositions but also on the group's normative and relational climate. Environments that value cooperation, solidarity, mutual support, and respect are more likely to facilitate the internalisation of these attitudes through psychosocial learning. Within religiously shaped peer communities, including parish youth groups, faith-based youth associations, and catechetical groups, prosocial development may be further encouraged by shared moral narratives, communal practices, credible role models, and direct participation in service. Natural social groups thus connect personal moral development with the broader social and religious contexts in which prosocial behaviour is interpreted, learned, practised, and reinforced.

4. Psychosocial Learning and Prosocial Formation in Social-Psychological and Pastoral Training

Whereas psychosocial learning in families and peer groups often occurs spontaneously, structured training programmes make its objectives, activities, and reflective processes explicit. The broader field of personal and social education seeks to develop individual potential, talents, and personal capacities (Prod'Homme 2008). Social-psychological training extends this aim by intentionally cultivating interpersonal competencies through methods grounded in experiential and psychosocial learning.

Social-psychological training can be understood as a structured experiential process that integrates practical activity with theoretical interpretation and reflection. It supports the internalisation of social and behavioural patterns as well as their enactment in interpersonal situations. At the intrapersonal level, training may develop self-awareness, emotional recognition, authenticity, and self-reflection. At the interpersonal level, it may foster empathy, acceptance of others, communication, perspective-taking, conflict resolution, and prosocial behaviour. These competencies correspond with Christian anthropological and

ethical perspectives that emphasise compassion, solidarity, and responsibility for others within interpersonal relationships (Adam and Trstenský 2024, pp. 53–67; Plašienková 2013, pp. 665–78).

The intentional cultivation of prosocial behaviour is therefore an important objective of social-psychological training. As discussed above, prosocial behaviour encompasses voluntary actions intended to benefit others, although these actions may arise from different motivations. Structured exercises can promote empathy, emotional support, cooperation, and a willingness to help by enabling participants to practise these forms of conduct and examine the motivations and consequences associated with them. From the perspective of religious education, training can serve as a practical environment in which moral values are not merely explained but enacted, experienced, and critically reflected upon.

For analytical purposes, psychosocial learning within a training activity can be described as a sequence of four interrelated stages: the formulation of objectives, instruction, action, and reflection. This sequence does not represent a rigid procedure; rather, it identifies the main elements through which an exercise can facilitate intentional learning. At the first stage, the facilitator defines the competencies to be developed and clarifies how the activity relates to participants' personal and social development. In a religiously oriented context, the objectives may include sensitivity to the needs of others, responsibility within community life, compassion, solidarity, and service.

The instructional stage introduces the activity and establishes the conditions necessary for participation. Even when an exercise appears simple, its presentation requires sensitivity to differences in participants' emotional readiness, previous experience, and willingness to disclose personal feelings. Clear boundaries and an atmosphere of trust are particularly important in educational and pastoral settings, where exercises may involve vulnerability, empathy, interpersonal support, or reflection on morally significant experiences.

During the action stage, participants engage in activities that reproduce or draw upon interpersonal situations and allow them to experiment with prosocial forms of conduct. Such exercises may reveal how participants recognise the needs of others, respond to emotional cues, cooperate, offer assistance, or manage interpersonal tension. Within Christian educational environments, practical activity may also help participants relate concrete social action to solidarity, mercy, forgiveness, service, and responsibility towards vulnerable persons.

Reflection transforms the activity from an isolated experience into an opportunity for psychosocial learning. Guided individual or group reflection enables participants to examine their actions, emotions, motivations, and responses to others. It can also help them recognise alternative forms of conduct and identify principles that may be applied in subsequent situations. In religious education, reflection adds an interpretive dimension by relating interpersonal experience to moral commitments and spiritual values. Helping behaviour can consequently be understood not only as a useful social competence but also as an expression of a broader orientation towards the good of others.

These principles are particularly relevant to training for pastoral care, which requires the integration of interpersonal competence, ethical responsibility, and spiritual sensitivity (Hospodár 2025, pp. 154–62; Weber et al. 2023, pp. 973–74). Pastoral care is a form of spiritual accompaniment that supports individuals in their personal and spiritual orientation within a Christian understanding of life (Ďatelinka et al. 2022, pp. 455–66; Dedová and Báník 2021, pp. 60–69). Training for pastoral care can therefore be understood as a form of value-oriented education in which psychosocial competencies are cultivated within a framework of compassion, solidarity, respect for human dignity, and responsibility for others.

Pastoral listening and dialogue are central competencies within this form of training (Tkáčová 2024, p. 1218). Active listening involves sustained attention to another person's words, emotions, perspective, and circumstances, together with responses that communicate understanding and respect. It thereby contributes to the establishment of authentic and supportive interpersonal relationships (Petrikovičová et al. 2024, pp. 148–54; Bieliková et al. 2024, pp. 255–63). These competencies may be developed through paired dialogue, role-based exercises, observation, feedback, and group reflection (Křivohlavý 2001). Such activities cultivate not only communication techniques but also attentiveness, empathy, patience, and readiness to accompany another person.

The learning processes involved in social-psychological and pastoral training can be further interpreted through experiential learning theory. Kolb's experiential learning cycle describes learning as a recurring movement through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb and Kolb 2013). Participants first encounter a concrete interpersonal situation, whether in everyday life or a structured exercise. They subsequently reflect on their actions, emotions, and interactions before formulating more general insights into their own behaviour and the responses of others. These insights can then guide new forms of action in subsequent situations.

In prosocial training, participants may initially practise helping, cooperation, attentive listening, or conflict resolution in simulated or real situations. Reflection enables them to evaluate the effects of their conduct and to identify factors that facilitated or obstructed a prosocial response. They can then formulate principles for more effective and ethically responsible interaction and test these insights in new circumstances. Repeated cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation can gradually strengthen empathy, cooperation, and socially responsible action (Hajduchová et al. 2021, pp. 305–14; Zášková et al. 2023, pp. 50–59; Medzihradský et al. 2023, p. 450).

Within religiously oriented training, this experiential cycle also enables participants to connect interpersonal experience with moral and spiritual interpretation. Values such as compassion, solidarity, forgiveness, and service are thereby related to specific actions and relationships rather than remaining at the level of abstract instruction. Experiential learning does not itself guarantee moral or spiritual formation; its formative significance depends on the aims of the programme, the quality of facilitation, the values informing reflection, and the relational environment in which learning occurs.

Social-psychological and pastoral training thus constitute structured environments in which psychosocial learning can be intentionally directed towards prosocial formation. In contrast to natural social groups, where learning is often implicit and spontaneous, training programmes make processes of action, observation, feedback, reflection, and behavioural development more explicit. They can therefore serve as valuable educational and pastoral means of cultivating empathy, cooperation, solidarity, and responsibility (Viglaský and Tóthová 2024, pp. 242–54; Judák et al. 2023, pp. 514–25). Within Christian religious education, their distinctive contribution lies in connecting interpersonal competence with a moral and spiritual orientation towards the good of others.

5. Conclusions

The conceptual analysis presented in this study indicates that prosocial behaviour is an important dimension of social, moral, and religious formation. It encompasses voluntary actions intended to benefit others, including helping, cooperation, emotional support, solidarity, and responses to the needs of vulnerable persons. The motivations underlying such conduct may vary; altruism represents its more specific form, characterised by a primary concern for the well-being of others. Within Christian religious education,

prosocial behaviour is not merely a socially desirable competence. It can also express moral responsibility, respect for human dignity, and an orientation towards the good of others.

Psychosocial learning provides a useful theoretical framework for explaining how prosocial dispositions are acquired and developed. Observational learning, imitation, identification, modelling, self-regulation, and reflection demonstrate that moral formation does not occur through verbal instruction alone. Values are also communicated and internalised through relationships, credible examples, communal practices, participation, and lived experience. Psychosocial learning therefore helps explain the mechanisms through which the moral and religious meanings communicated in Christian education may become embodied in interpersonal conduct.

This analysis has distinguished between two complementary environments of prosocial formation. In natural social groups, particularly families and peer communities, psychosocial learning is embedded in everyday interaction and often occurs implicitly. These groups provide early and sustained opportunities to observe, practise, negotiate, and internalise patterns of social behaviour. Social-psychological and pastoral training, by contrast, create structured conditions in which action, observation, feedback, reflection, and experimentation can be intentionally directed towards particular competencies. Such programmes do not replace the formative role of natural social groups but may complement it by making psychosocial learning processes more explicit and reflective.

The distinctive contribution of religious education lies not in introducing entirely different mechanisms of social learning but in providing them with a particular moral, communal, and spiritual horizon. Christian narratives, values, rituals, practices, and moral exemplars can connect prosocial conduct with compassion, forgiveness, solidarity, service, and responsibility towards vulnerable persons. This connection is not automatic, however. Its formative significance depends on the credibility of role models, the quality of relationships and communal practices, the aims of educational activities, and the manner in which experience is interpreted through reflection.

As a conceptual study based on a purposive review and qualitative synthesis of the literature, this article does not establish causal relationships or offer empirically generalisable conclusions. Its focus on Christian educational contexts also limits its applicability to other religious traditions, while its exclusion of formal school-based religious education leaves an important institutional setting for separate investigation. Further research could empirically examine how psychosocial learning operates in families, religious peer communities, pastoral programmes, and social-psychological training. Comparative and longitudinal studies could also explore how different religious, cultural, and denominational contexts influence the relationship between moral interpretation, social learning mechanisms, and sustained prosocial conduct.

The principal contribution of this study is therefore the integration of two complementary perspectives: religious education as a source of moral and spiritual interpretation, and psychosocial learning as an account of the mechanisms through which values may be translated into dispositions and practices. Their intersection provides a coherent framework for understanding how Christian educational environments can contribute to the formation of persons capable of empathy, cooperation, solidarity, and responsible action towards others.

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