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Secondary School in the Russian Federation and Russian Orthodox Church at the Beginning of the 21st Century

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Abstract

In this article we review major points of view of supporters and opponents of church presence into Russian secondary school in the modern context. Those who support church presence in the secondary school claim that it is necessary and argue that people are willing to have Orthodox education, relations between the church and the government have been improved, it is necessary to introduce the pluralistic model of public-church relations, it is in line with the historical identity of the tradition, and that there is a necessity to eliminate systemic imbalances between secondary and faith school. The opponents of the Orthodox education introduction into the context of modern secondary school include atheist parents of students, followers of other religions, supporters of liberal modernization models for Russia, and the group of Russian “intelligentsia” who traditionally do not trust Orthodox Church as a social institution. Major periods of interaction between Russian Orthodox Church and Russian secondary school are specified. We have analyzed the situation in several regions where Orthodox education encountered resistance from the representatives of other religions. Major tendencies of Orthodox education development in the context of new government approaches to the problem are estimated. We explored the role of the course “Fundamentals of Orthodox culture and ethic”, as a compromise of a kind, due to which the problem of Orthodox education promotion in the republics with non-Orthodox population was resolved.

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1. Introduction

The Church's educational involvement faces several obstacles today. In the public perception, there are at least two points of view on the problem: the Church position is to further overtake into the structures and the content of secular education. The secular point of view implies that Orthodoxy should not be allowed in schools because in a religious doctrine one can always find certain ideological principles, however the Russian Federation Constitution says that no official ideology may be established as mandatory. The conflict of these two positions is reflected not only in a spiritual sphere but also in politics, ideology, social sphere, etc. It appears necessary to find adequate solutions concerning relations between the Church and school.

2. Objective, methodology and research design

The objective of this research is twofold: to evaluate the meaning of positions of supporters and opponents of a penetrating religious aspect into secondary school and to define a practical and political vector of appropriate conflict resolution. Objectivism is a methodological base of the undertaken research (independent evaluation of all the viewpoints without taking sides), stratification approach (an attempt to evaluate the status dynamics of the Church in general and Russian Orthodox Church in particular), analysis of a particular social situation and methods of social planning. The following periods of situation development are reviewed: 1990s – 2008; 2009 up to the present day.

3. Discussion of the research outcome

3.1 *Conflict of interests and the parties' positions.*

The clash of opinions of pro-religious and non-religious supporters pressures to clarifying the parties' positions. Supporters of religious education usually argue that:

1. People want it. Let us take, for example, the position of the Archpriest V. Chaplin: "Compulsory education in Russia is secular and, apparently, it should not be changed to avoid the violence against children soul. However children willing to study the Law of God (or Quran and Torah) should have the right for it, and if there is a majority of these children at school, their families are entitled to demand the government to provide voluntary religious lessons for faithful children" (Chaplin, 2001, p. 78). Here are the words of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, being still a metropolitan: "In Russia there is still hope to acquaint people with faith in God and the life of the Russian Orthodox Church" (Kirill Metropolitan, 2002, p. 31); from his speech during a scientifically-practical conference 'Collaboration between the government and the Church in educational sphere' on December 2002 we can find the following conclusion: "Secular school is a school free from clerical power but not the school denying the existence of religious beliefs" (Gan`zhin, 2002, p. 19). At the same time we should underline the fact that among the students and their parents the majority support the lessons covering the information about religious culture in some way (Peikova, 2003);
2. It will contribute to a better "collaboration between the Church and the government" (Peikova 2003, p. 23), said the Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation in the Central Federal District Poltavchenko during the aforementioned conference;
3. It is in line with the principle of pluralist democracy as opposed to post-Soviet atheism. On March 5th and 7th in Moscow took place XI World Russian People's Council. In its resolution 'About teaching the fundamentals of Orthodox culture in school' it was said: "The dialogue between government and society is necessary to stop the monopoly of material vision of the world in Russian educational system that appeared during the Soviet times" (Gan`zhin, 2002, pp. 17-18);
4. It will regain spiritual tradition. In 2002 Patriarch Aleksy II was giving his speech at Christmas

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