

RELIGION CLASSES IN STATE INSTITUTIONS IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Joseph A. Loya. O.S.A.

The historical trajectory of Russia since the eighteenth century may be segmented into a centuries-long period of state control of the established Russian Orthodox Church, followed by the 20th century era of state-supported atheism, followed by the current difficult experience as a constitutionally guaranteed pluralistic democracy attempting to configure a stable church-state relationship as both realms are impacted by the process of globalization. Issues that test the socio-political program of the “New Russia” with regard to the area of state-sponsored education include the following: What should be learned from the schooling models of other democratic countries? How should the state draw the distinction between freedom of religion and freedom from religion? What constitutes a unique and appropriate Russian pedagogy? The Russian Orthodox Church asserts its status as a major formative factor at the core of Russian national identity and culture; to what extent does the Church’s employment of this “culture card” in the promotion of curriculum development compromise the Law on Education that guarantees the secular nature of education in Russia? Is the Orthodox Church recognizing the distinction between education and evangelization? What problems arise for other Christians and non-Christians, especially for Russia’s large Muslim minority? Informed social commentators and reporters describe the current scene and the intersection of the avenues of State, Religion and Education:

“The fall of the Soviet regime brought numerous changes and challenges to Russia’s public school system....Currently, the Russian Ministry of Education and the ROC [Russian Orthodox Church] exhibit both agreements and disagreements about the best vision for the relationship between religion, morality and education in Russia’s public system of education.” - Perry Glanzer, Baylor University, and Gregory Kljucharev, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.¹

“The relations between religion and education in Russia are currently very unstable....The religious and educational landscapes are evolving independently of each other, at a different pace, and the modes of interaction

¹Perry Glanzer and Gregory Kljucharev, “Russian Orthodoxy, the Russian Ministry of Education, and Post-Communist Moral Education,” *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*. Christopher Marsh, ed., Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, Boston University, 2004, p. 53.

with the political, economic and cultural domains are multiple and diverse” - Mikhail Siverstev, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.²

“The recent proposal for the systematic introduction of an optional subject on Orthodox Culture into state schools was the first time that the Moscow Patriarchate publicly laid claim to state-assisted influence in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. Debate on this issue consistently revealed - and continues to reveal - a deep divide in public and professional opinion.” - Forum 18.³

“Disputes about religion lessons in the secular school are still heated.” - Pravda⁴

The following is a chronological ordering of actions, ideas and ideals that conditioned the evolution of this present state of affairs.

I. Overview of the Years 1991- 2001: Efforts to Supplant Marxist Ethical Ideology.

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Ministry of Education made the decision to introduce religious studies in Russian schools by means of curricula stressing Christian ethics and morality. With the help of American sponsors and Dr. Alexander Abramov, a Moscow publisher, secondary schools were supplied with the Gospel of Mark, the Book of Proverbs, and Alexander Men’s History of Religion in several metropolitan areas. Fiscal constraints left small cities and rural areas without assistance.⁵ Officials of the Ministry also approached western Christian educators for assistance in replacing the discredited ethical and moral principles that had formerly been supplied by the prevailing Marxist ideology. The response was a collaborative effort of eighty-three western Evangelical mission groups, collectively known as the CoMission, which instructed Russian public school educators in the teaching of Christian ethics and morality. The Protocol of Intention signed by the Russian Ministry of Education and the CoMission provided for a five-year partnership (1992-1997) to develop ethics and morals curricula for Russian public schools. The establishment of the CoMission represented a quite remarkable example of

²Mikhail Silvertsev, “Religion and the Education System in Russia,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2001, p. 129.

³Geraldine Fagan, “Russia: Religious Freedom Survey,” Forum 18 News, 29 July, 2003. http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=116

⁴Pravda, “Lessons on religion to become compulsory at Russian schools,” 15 November, 2004, 10:21.

⁵Dick Scheuerman, “Christian Classics for Russian Schools,” *East-West Church & Ministry Report*, Vol. 4 (Winter 1996) p. 12.

collaboration between Western religious entities and a Ministry of a secular foreign government.⁶ At first the Russian Orthodox Church was supportive of this initiative, but when it became clear to both the Ministry and the Church that the commission groups proved to be more interested in evangelization, conversion and church planting than they were in ethical pedagogy the project was suppressed.⁷

The close of the millennium witnessed the formation of a Coordinating Council for Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Moscow Patriarchate. The Council decided that the state norm should consist of a general multi-confessional section – that is, humanities and a professional training in various disciplines – and a confessional section. The latter would be provided by the various confessions according to a fixed model. These confessions are the so-called “traditional” religions of Russia that were designated in the 1997 law on religion: Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Thus the state recognizes four variants in theological education.⁸

In February, 2001, the state norm of theology leading to Bachelor's and Masters' degrees was recognized by the Ministry of Education, and eight universities received permission to introduce the new study program in Orthodox Theology.⁹ On April 24, 2001, a roundtable conference, “Religious Education in Russia: Problems and Prospects,” was held at the parliament of the Russian Federation. The participants agreed in principle that the secular character of Russia’s state school system should not exclude education based on a

⁶Irina Bill, "Religion in Public Schools: First Protestant, Now Orthodox," *East-West Church & Ministry Report*, Vol. 10 (Fall 2002) p. 4.

⁷The story of the CoMission was published in book form, *The Quest for Russia's Soul: Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia*, by Perry L. Glanzer (Texas A&M University Press, 2002). An insightful review of the book was published by Donald Fairbairn in the journal *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Volume XXIII, No. 5, October, 2003.

⁸Wil van den Bercken, “Theological Education for Laypeople in Russia, Belarus’ and Ukraine: A Survey of Orthodox and Catholic Institutions,” *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 3, (September, 2004) p. 309.

⁹Wil van den Bercken also writes informs: As of 2003 there were ten universities in Russia which offered a theological curriculum: Omsk and Barnaul (which adapted their existing study to the new standard), Belgorod, Orel, Ryazan', Sarov, Yekaterinburg, Vladivostok and Tula (which has two institutions). Altogether these universities have about 500 students. A programme 'Islamic theology' is offered at the Russian Islamic University in Kazan. The new theological faculties or departments at the state universities have all started from scratch and continue to face immense issues in terms of funding and resources for research. The two main universities, Moscow State University (MGU) and St Petersburg State University, do not have plans for creating theological faculties. Both these universities have well-developed philosophical faculties with good departments of religious studies (at MGU 124 students), and these faculties prefer to remain independent from the Orthodox Church. He adds, “However controversial theological studies at the state universities may seem from a political point of view, one has to bear in mind that Russia is not exceptional in this respect: it fits into the European tradition. However, there is one crucial difference between Russia and Western Europe: in the West all Christian confessions have the right to create a theological faculty at a state university, or to establish their own theological university with support from the government when they meet the required academic standards. In Russia the Orthodox Church has by law a monopoly.” p. 310.

religious outlook. The meeting's final document highlighted the priority of spiritual education in Russian schools.¹⁰

In August of 2001, Pravda reported on an address given by Alexis II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, that was telecast by the ORT company, national Channel One, on the threshold of a new the academic year. The Patriarch pledged the Church's cooperation in promotion and guarantee of sound education for Russian youth: "Life is changing, people are changing, so the schools must change, too. However, we are not to give up the best achievements of the pre-revolutionary and Soviet educational systems. This point mostly concerns accessibility of education - whoever thirsts for knowledge must have it." He asserted the Church's desire for closer contacts with the secular educational network. He noted that the Russian word for education, "obrazovanie", derives from "obraz Bozhi", the image of God. He also described the Christian concept of education as a process that is focused on the cognition of God and spiritual inspiration: "Education does not boil down to acquisition and storage of information. It shall foster an honest and independent personality inspired by spiritual ideals--the true citizen."¹¹

II. Further Religious Initiatives; Secularist Reactions

In January of 2002, Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and all-Rus called for expanding the experience of teaching "Fundamentals of Orthodox culture" to all state school in Russia in his introductory address to the opening of the Tenth International Christmas Readings. The patriarch noted that tens of thousand of teachers that would be needed for expanding the teaching of this subject had already been trained in the ecclesiastical schools and in the Russian Orthodox University, and, more recently, within the advanced theological education of secular undergraduate institutions.¹²

On June 28, 2002, the Executive Director of the "For Human Rights" All-Russian Public Movement, L.A. Ponomarev, petitioned the Prosecutor General of Russian Federation to open a criminal case against the first prorector of the Moscow Institute for the Continuing Education of Educators, S.B. Romanov, and the leaders of the Ministry of Education who recommended for educational institutions the textbook, *Foundations of*

¹⁰Fedor Kozyrev, *East-West Church & Ministry Report*, Vol. 10 (No. 4, Fall, 2002) pp. 2-3.

¹¹*Pravda*, 28 August, 2001, 01:51 <http://english.pravda.ru/culture/2001/08/28/13512.html>

¹²Posted by Paul D. Steeves on his website "Russia Religion News" on 2 February, 2002. <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0202a.html>

Orthodox Culture, by Alla Borodina, The basis of the charge was transgression of Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code that prohibits the incitement of national and religious hostilities. The textbook was asserted by the plaintiffs to be anti-Semitic in its teachings and thus a cause of inter ethnic strife and xenophobia.¹³ The petition also contained a call for verification of the conformity to constitutional principles of the activity of the Coordinating Council on Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate of Russian Orthodox Church. This petition for legal action was forwarded to the Prosecutor's Office of Moscow's Ostankino District for deliberation on the substance of the charge. On September 4, 2002, the District Prosecutor issued an order refusing to open a criminal case.¹⁴

On Oct 22, 2002, Education Minister Vladimir Filippov released a 30-page description of an optional course called "Orthodox Culture" that could be taught in public schools as a part of the basic curriculum if regional education officials or a school's principal decides to do so. The 30-page document is a vast catalogue of themes, including Biblical subjects, Orthodox tradition, asceticism, liturgy, literature and art. By the end of the course, a student could be asked to write a paper on one of 64 subjects, such as "Faith and Science," "Moscow as the Third Rome" or "Orthodox Understanding of Freedom." Government spokesman Alexei Volin asserted, "This document smacks of the Middle Ages and obscurantism. If the Education Ministry considers it necessary to introduce studies in religion, the course should include the basics of all religious world views and the history of atheism in addition."¹⁵ He also insisted that religious instruction must take place outside school hours.¹⁶

¹³This critique of the book that was prepared by the director of the Center for the Study of Religions of Russian State Humanities University, N.V. Shaburov, appeared on the Religii i SMI site, 16 January, 2003. In part: "... in a number of cases the writer indulges in expressions that are insulting to representatives of the Jewish people. I permit myself to quote: "Pilate, who did not find Jesus guilty, called his soldiers to beat him, hoping that the Jews would be satisfied. ... But the Jews would not be pacified and continued to insist on Christ's execution. They stirred up the people so that they would demand the crucifixion of Christ ... The reason for this was that this people thought only about earth, about their own independence, and power over other peoples and about earthly prosperity, and therefore the idea of eternal life through salvation from sins, passions, and evil was incomprehensible to it." (p. 112). The author should explain to school children that the accusations against the Jews in the gospels were conditioned by the polemical tasks of the authors of the gospels. One should not forget that both Jesus and the apostles were Jews. Judaism at the time of Jesus was divided into a number of streams that were strongly distinguished from one another." <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0307i.html>

¹⁴"Order of Meshchansky District Court of Moscow on Case Concerning 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' Textbook," 15 July, 2003. Published on the Portal-credo.ru site, 18 July, 2003.

¹⁵ Andrei Zolotov Jr., "Schools to Teach Orthodox Culture," *Moscow Times*, 18 November, 2002 . [http://www.propertyrightsresearch.org/schools to teach orthodox cultur.htm](http://www.propertyrightsresearch.org/schools%20to%20teach%20orthodox%20cult.htm).

¹⁶*Keston News Service*, 4 December, 2002. Posted 6 December 2002 on RELIGIOSCOPE, http://www.religioscope.com/articles/2002/031_russia_schools.htm

The Russian Islamic leadership split in its response to the course. "We are not against our Orthodox brothers finding out as much as possible about their culture," said Mufti Ravil Gainutdin, chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia. He stressed, however, that the voluntary aspect is crucial and complained that Russia's Muslims and other religious groups are unable to reach all schools because they suffered even more than the Orthodox Church during the Soviet period.¹⁷ According to Gainutdin, even in such large cities as Moscow and Petersburg, the imams could not provide for all of the secondary schools. Nafigulla Ashirov, the Mufti of Siberia, strongly opposed the Orthodoxy course. "Russia is living through one of the most complicated moments in its history, and raising this issue when the Chechnya wound is bleeding in the south of Russia, when skinheads are walking the streets of Moscow, is a direct violation of the Constitution."¹⁸

The course was subjected to intense criticism as a de facto course in Divine Law, and not an education in Orthodox culture at all. It was asserted that the basic points of the contents of the curriculum virtually coincide with courses that are taught in Orthodox ecclesiastical seminaries. Thus, under the guise of a secular religious studies discipline, children will receive a purely confessional theological education.¹⁹

On November 21, 2002, Minister of Education Filippov published an article in which he lamented the spiritual poverty of his nation. Among the points he pressed were the following: Orthodox culture is two millenniums old, and cannot be ignored any more than Greek culture, although for over seventy years the Soviet regime tried to deprive citizens of their rightful share of their own heritage. It is no use pressing children to visit the Russian Museum or the Tretyakov Gallery, where the two thirds of Russian artists' paintings have Biblical subjects, unless the younger generation is grounded in the bases of the Orthodox culture. As to the formal aspect of the matter of education in culture, his description of the Orthodox culture course that was being so emotionally discussed in the press was a response to the request of several regions to give recommendations regarding the teaching of the Basics of the Orthodox Culture; it was a purely informational response. One should not confuse secular education with atheistic one; atheistic convictions have much in common

¹⁷Oleg Nedumov, "Russian Schools Cease to be Secular. Church and Government Workers Force Children to Study Orthodox Theology," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 November, 2002. (tr. by PDS, posted 18 November, 2002, <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0211b.html>).

¹⁸Andrei Zolotov Jr., *Moscow Times*, 18 November, 2002. http://www.propertyrightsresearch.org/schools_to_teach_orthodox_cultur.htm

¹⁹Oleg Nedumov, "Russian Schools Cease to be Secular. Church and Government Workers Force Children to Study Orthodox Theology," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 November.

with religious convictions. The notion of the secular nature of education must include recognition of the fact that state-run educational institutions are not to be in the business of training the personnel for any particular confession. Secular, not religious, approaches are to be employed in the study of the basics of the Orthodox culture. All textbooks involved in the federal and regional curricula will be distributed to schools only with the stamp “Permitted by the Ministry of Education.”²⁰

An article entitled “School Should Respect One's Choice of Worldview,” by Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, Vice-Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, was published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on November 28, 2002. He stated,

“No one has remembered for some reason that religion is traditional for state schools in most of the European countries. Post-totalitarian countries, such as Serbia, Romania and most of Central European and Baltic countries, as well as Georgia and Armenia, are confidently returning to the traditional system of religion-school relations. Over years, Orthodoxy has been taught in hundreds of state schools throughout Russia without arousing inter-confessional confrontations.”

He also drew attention to some international regulations which, he contended, are not popular and openly ignored in Russia. The United Nation’s Convention against Discrimination in Education states that parents should be able to “ensure religious and moral education of the children in conformity with their own convictions.” Protocol No.1 to the European Human Rights Convention states:

“In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.”

Materialistic ideology and utilitarian morality are still prevailing in school. The interpretation of religion as a merely social phenomenon sounds blasphemous for any religious person, be it a child, a parent or a teacher. The Russian state and educational system are secular; however, that does not mean that it should be atheistic, as Patriarch Alexy II said. School should become a home for the Orthodox faithful, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants and non-believers; for this purpose their worldviews are not to be reduced to a common

²⁰Vladimir Filippov, “We Proved to be Spiritually Poor,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, No. 221 (3089), 21 November, 2002.

denominator. Let every child hear from his teacher what would accord with his life choice and that of his parents.²¹

III. Continued Clarification of Positions

In the first days of 2003 Patriarch Alexis II stated, "It is amazing that the question about the teachings of the fundamentals of Orthodox Church has become so acute at just this time. Hundreds of state schools throughout Russia have had many years of positive experience of the teaching of this topic."²² He affirmed that, inasmuch as Orthodoxy is first and foremost Christian faith, the study of Orthodox culture would aid students in the understanding of other Christian countries. He expressed dismay at the suggestion that the Fundamentals of Orthodox culture be substituted with a supposedly "even handed," skeptical presentation of all religions of the world. It was his view that, to follow such logic, the school must reject even Russia's own history or literature as separate subjects or give them no more attention than, say, the history and literature of New Zealand, a country that is doubtless interesting but still far away.²³

On July 1, 2003, Minister Filippov issued guidelines on how and under what circumstances religion courses may be conducted on state properties outside normal school time. The guidelines emphasized student consent, parental initiative toward the local education authorities, and clear identification labeling of instructional materials and equipment by the sponsoring religious bodies.²² In late August the Director of Moscow's Department of Education, Liubov Kezina, came out squarely against the introduction of "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" into state schools, claiming that to do so would violate the consciences and upset the numerous non-Russians and non-Orthodox believers who constitute the school populations.²⁴

²¹Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, "School Should Respect One's Choice of Worldview," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 November, 2002. <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne211281.htm>

²²Regarding the original order of 15 January 2003, in its resolution portion there is a statement only of refusal to open a criminal case "on the incident of publication and distribution of the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' textbook." Other reasons for the plaintiff's plea to open a criminal case were not evaluated (on holding Romanov and the leaders of the Russian Ministry of Education accountable for a criminal act, verification of the activity of the coordinating council). Thus, the incompleteness of the verification actions that were conducted on the complaint of the plaintiff is obvious. 15 July 2003. Published on the Portal-credo.ru site, 18 July, 2003, <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0307i.html>.

²³Pavel Korobov, "Patriarch Alexis II: Many Areas in Church-State Relations Need Correcting," *Kommersant-Daily*, 9 January, 2003 (tr. by PDS, posted 10 January 2003). <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0301c.html>

²⁴<http://portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=12975>. Translated by J. Loya, O.S.A.

In a speech before the Plenary session of the Russian Academy of Education, the Patriarch criticized the seventy history textbooks having received the Ministry of Education's stamp of approval for lacking an appropriate sense of patriotism and love for the Motherland. He again reiterated that the Orthodox Culture courses were no mere catechetical exercises, but valid and substantial culturological studies; corresponding courses in the Fundamentals of Islam, Buddhism and Judaism - the traditional faiths of Russia - should be developed in regions where those religions hold sway.²⁵

On 19 May, 2004, it was reported that the Interreligious Council of Russia called for new Russian Minister of Education and Science Andrei Fursenko to give to school children the possibility of studying religious culture from the point of view of religious organizations. "We think that the information contained in the general humanities courses on the history and values of world religions is very fragmentary and often tendentious and in such a context it results in the children's receiving actually distorted information," the letter to the minister says. Leaders and representatives of traditional religious organizations in Russia are concerned that "those who graduate from the schools today know almost nothing about the values and religious culture of their own people or of other peoples constituting Russian society." In the opinion of members of the Interreligious Council the teaching of school information about religion is accompanied by explanations from an exclusively atheistic position; proper religious explanations of various aspects of religious culture are either given in abbreviated form or are absent entirely. For a resolution of this problem the Interreligious Council proposes teaching religion in the schools in a way that involves religious organizations.²⁶

Speaking to reporters in Moscow on 30 August, Minister Fursenko said a course on the history of all religious faiths professed by the peoples of Russia should not be confused with religious instruction. "In our country, schools are separated from the church, and children receive a secular education," he affirmed. Also, lessons in the history of world religions at school must not be optional and they are to be taught by secular teachers. Lessons in the fundamentals of the world religions should be secular in nature and optional in

²⁵ News of the Patriarchate Service, April 21, 2004. <http://62.181.46.230/?sid=44&did=223> semditza 21.04.2004

²⁶<http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0405c.html> . Sedmitsa.ru 19 May, 2004 (tr by PDS 19 May, 2004).

practice. He confirmed that he was in the process of compiling textbooks and drafts of two manuals on history of religions.²⁷

In a related matter, the Secretary of the Moscow Patriarchate Public Relations Department, Mikhail Dudko, said in an interview to RIA Novosti that Russian Moslems, Jews and Buddhists insist that fundamentals of any particular religion must be taught in those parts of the country where the majority of the population practice this religion. Dudko reported that “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” are already taught in some parts of the country, with no intensification of ethnic hatred having been registered there. On the contrary, he said that such knowledge helps people understand each other better. Spokespersons for the Russian Orthodox Church asserted that some parts of a textbook about fundamentals of the world religions were not coordinated with church experts, nor was the new course coordinated with clergymen of other confessions.²⁸

In late November Patriarch Alexis II spoke at a gala to mark the 5th anniversary of the Patriarch's Center for Spiritual Development of the Young in Moscow's Monastery of St. Daniel. The Patriarch committed the Russian Church to continued efforts to introduce basic courses in Orthodox Christian culture to the school curriculum in the conviction that the courses “will provide moral reference points.” According to the Patriarch, Orthodox culture basics have already been introduced at secondary schools in a number of Russian regions, and everywhere they have fit in perfectly with other courses on the curriculum. He also emphasized that the Russian Church sees it as its duty to provide the young with moral immunity against the many temptations they are facing today.²⁹

IV. Ecumenical Entanglement; Resolute Promotion of Agendas

On 1 June, 2005, at a session of the Council for Relations with Religious Associations of the Russian Federation's presidential administration, Archbishop Tadesz Kondrusiewicz, the head of the Catholic Archdiocese of the Mother of God, with its center in Moscow, expressed the opinion that a topic such as religious studies is more fitting for secondary schools and that the foundations of faith should be taught in churches. In doing so he cited examples of the experience of Lithuania, Poland, Italy, and Spain. In particular, he

²⁷<http://www.kirchen-in-osteuropa.de/archiv/04090201.htm#12>

²⁸*Pravda*, Yegor Belous, 15 November, 2004, 10:21. http://english.pravda.ru/main/18/88/351/14584_religion.html

²⁹*RIA Novosti*, November 23, 2004.

said that in Lithuania, Catholic bishops came to the conclusion that the schools do not manage to train children well for the sacraments nor instill the truth of the faith.

The Archbishop's comments caused bewilderment and consternation in the Moscow Patriarchate. Spokesman for the Patriarchate Father Vsevolod Chaplin expressed amazement that "a Russian Catholic hierarch is in solidarity, not with the position of the Roman Catholic church in these countries that continue to insist upon Catholic education in state schools, but with the position of anticlericals, who demand its removal." He continued, "If I understood his speech ... correctly, he thinks that the traditional experience of Catholic countries is negative and a thing of the past." According to Fr. Chaplin, if indeed the Catholic Archbishop proposes teaching the foundations of faith exclusively in parishes, then "it is good to propose that in Poland or Italy, where there is a great quantity of Catholic schools. In Russia, where the buildings of tens of thousands of church schools were confiscated after 1917, parishes usually do not possess school facilities, and the situation is completely different." He also mentioned that throughout Europe, as in a majority of the countries of the world, school children study separately the teaching of those religions to which their families belong.

"The other day," he continued, "the archbishop somewhat modified his position, saying that in some countries the teaching of religion is a normal thing, but in countries that experienced antireligious persecution it is ineffective, since here the religious knowledge of children bears an abstract character. So then does the esteemed archbishop propose for us to intensify that abnormal situation that was created by the persecution of the church? It is not clear why Archbishop Kondrusiewicz actually is arguing for the French model of the total banishment of religion from the schools, which today many are even criticizing in France, seeing that it is leading to the moral and spiritual weakness of society."³⁰

Clearly, the Moscow Patriarchate heard the Archbishop's remarks as an undermining of the dialogue between the two churches and a cause of serious harm to the business of preaching Christian values in Russia.³¹ On June 7, Bishop Mark of Egorievsk (a deputy in the Patriarchate's Department of External Relations,) sent a letter to Archbishop Antonio Mennini, the representative of the Holy See in the Russian Federation, raising the issue of Archbishop Kondrusiewicz's remarks. In the response letter to Bishop Mark, the nuncio stressed that the Catholic church in Russia will support the attempts of the Russian Orthodox

³⁰*Mir Religii*, 14 June, 2005 (tr. by PDS, posted 15 June, 2005). <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0506f.html>.

³¹<http://portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=34570> (tr. by PDS, posted 23 June, 2005).

church with regard to religious and spiritual education of the Russian people, in a spirit of respect for the principles of freedom of conscience. Archbishop Mennini cited Pope Paul VI's 1965 declaration "Gravissimum Educationis", which specifically testifies that the Roman Catholic church acknowledges its obligation to be "carefully concerned for the moral and religious education of all of its children, [and] has demonstrated its special love and help for a multitude of children receiving education in non-Catholic schools." The representative of the Holy See affirmed that the Vatican "always has welcomed the teaching of the Catholic religion in all schools." Further, Mennini pointed to the experience of cooperation between the Vatican and the Italian government, citing the text of an agreement of 18 February 1984 and the Lateran Concordat of 11 February 1929, signed by the Italian republic and the Holy See. It states, specifically:

"The Italian republic, acknowledging the value of religious culture and taking into account that the principles of Catholicism are a part of the historical heritage of the Italian people, will assure in the future, within the context of the purposes of the schools, the teaching of the Catholic religion in all public educational institutions below the university level. In the spirit of respect for the freedom of conscience and the responsibilities of parents, each person is guaranteed the right to chose or not to chose the above mentioned subject. School children and their parents exercise this right at the time of enrollment upon the request of the school administration, and their choice cannot evoke any forms of discrimination."³²

The Union of Orthodox Citizens noted with a feeling of profound satisfaction that Archbishop Mennini's position on the question of teaching "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" in Russian schools and it is to be welcomed as a friendly step toward the Russian Orthodox church that creates additional preconditions for activating the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. The Union also suggested that the points of the agreement between the Catholic church and Italian government cited by Antonio Mennini relative to religious education in the schools should be used in the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox church and the Russian government, and that an agreement between the Russian Orthodox church and the Russian government on questions of cooperation in the sphere of education should be constructed on such principles.³³

In mid-June Minister Fursenko stated that without knowledge of the history of world religions a person cannot be cultured, but in the schools there should not be religious education in a pure form. "The position of the ministry is that religion, the history of religion,

³²Ibid.

³³ Posted on Portal-credo.ru site, 24 June, 2005.

and the culture of religion are an inseparable part of the history of the development of the country and the history of the development of the world.” He also reported that the development of a textbook on the history of world religions by associates of the Academy of Sciences has already been concluded. According to Fursenko, in it are expressed the opinions and positions of all confessions represented in Russia.³⁴ The Union of Orthodox Citizens accused Minister Fursenko of first mollifying citizens with assurances that the “Foundations of the Religions of Russia” course that he is working out would give Orthodoxy preeminence, but then betraying that commitment in a subsequent declaration that “no religion should be given preference.” The Union demanded the Minister's removal for this reversal in policy and, ostensibly, for being an obstructionist in the accreditation of Orthodox learning institutions.³⁵

On June 15, 2005, Alla Borodina published a spirited defense of her textbook, portraying those objecting to it as uncultured bureaucrats whose deep sense of religious intolerance causes them to ignore the demands of society. She also reported that at the present time she is working on a new course, the “History of Religious Culture.” Thus the “Foundations of Orthodox Culture” might be a part of an expanded separate course for acquainting children with the contemporary religious situation.³⁶

V. Concluding “Large Picture” Assessment

The relations between religion and education in present-day Russia are shaped in the context of a variety of educational models: private non-denominational establishments

³⁴*Mir Religii* 15 June, 2005. “Fursenko said, responding today in the State Duma during the ‘government hour’ to a question from deputies about how beneficial the introduction of religious education in the schools is. In the minister's opinion, ‘without understanding and without knowledge of how religions have developed and without the opportunity to work out a world view based on this knowledge, a person cannot be cultured.’ He reported that the development of a textbook on the history of world religions by associates of the Academy of Sciences has already been concluded. According to Fursenko, in it are expressed the opinions and positions of all confessions represented in Russia. The minister noted in connection with this that during the study of questions associated with religion, it is unconditionally necessary to talk about the cultural and political aspects. There should be no preference for individual religions, that is speaking more broadly there should not be religious education in its pure form in the schools, he emphasized.” <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0506f.html>.

³⁵Posted on Edinoe Otechestvo site, 15 June, 2005 (tr. by PDS, posted 15 June, 2005). <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0506f.html>.

³⁶*Mir Religii*, 15 June, 2005. http://www.religio.ru/news/10666_print.htm. The author of the textbook called special attention to the fact that her course is culturological and familiarizing and is not religion, and that the topic is especially adapted for secular children. According to Borodina, every chapter of the textbook has been carefully checked by various bodies, including the church, the Russian Academy of Education, the Textbook Association for Theology of MGU, the Federal Expert Council of the Ministry of Education and Science, and even the Institute for Strengthening Legality and Legal Order of the Prosecutor General's office. <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0506f.html>.

holding contracts with the state that include no religious discipline in their courses; “traditional” religions sponsoring secondary schools of higher education that issue both religious diploma for courses that comply with standards laid down by the Ministry of Education and a corresponding state diploma; private establishments that offer courses and seminars in the religious domain but are entitled to offer certificates of attendance but not diplomas; unregistered religious educational networks that positively eschew contact with state authorities.³⁷ The convictions that undergird these relations form a broad spectrum of philosophical convictions. On one extreme is the “strict constructionist” interpreters of the Constitution which declares that the Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religions may be instituted as state-sponsored or mandatory religion. Religious Associations shall be separated from the state, and shall be equal before the law (Article 28). Holders of this strict constructionist conviction include many citizens who are wary of any penetration of religion into public life, especially when it comes to education in schools. Parents are often afraid that some kind of new ideological control may enter schools under the guise of religious education and children may once again be told what is permitted and what is not - an echo of Russia's Communist history.³⁸

The polar opposite of this position is occupied by those, such as Russian nationalists and many hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate, who believe that to be Russian is to be Russian Orthodox, and thus the study of the Orthodoxy by Russia's citizens is to be as mandatory as studying the Russian language.

A difficult-to-define middle ground is being staked out by the Ministry of Education as it envisions a broad conception of civil society that seeks to include both secular and religious groups and organizations. Families should choose a form of “vospitanie” - moral or character education - of their liking. The voluntary nature of the programs protects a family's right to choose the comprehensive vision of the good with which they want to endow their children. (This in contrast to approaches to moral education in American public schools that often seek to find common moral teaching within a secular framework.)³⁹

³⁷Mikhail Sivertsev, “Religion and the education system in Russia,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 2 No.2, pp. 29-134.

³⁸Fedor Kozyrev, “On the Place and Role of Religious Education in Russian Schools: Retrospection and Forecasts, International association for Religious Freedom.” The International Association for Religious Freedom web site, <http://www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Russia.htm>.

³⁹Perry Glanzer and Gregory Klucharev, p. 58.

A space between the Ministry's position and that of the nationalist/Orthodox pole is being occupied by the so-called "Spirituality without Indoctrination" initiative of professional educators, theorists, administrators and clergy who promote various programs of religious education in schools intended to maximize student's knowledge of the world of religion and their national spiritual tradition without infringing on their fundamental rights and freedoms. Writes Fedor Kozyrev of the Centre for Religious Pedagogy:

"The participants of this movement believe that the alternative to indoctrination is not the absence of religious education in schools, but rather the consistent and well considered introduction of it. They also clearly understand that an attempt to pass religious education in school into the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church will not cause any reconciliation. In fact, it may have the opposite effect of aggravating the differences between secular and spiritual systems of education which have historically formed in our country and this is already happening in some places. This situation is likely to remain until the Church begins to realize that there is a difference between educational and missionary purposes."⁴⁰

At the time of the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century Russia assumed responsibility as the legatee of the former empire's ideal of a "symphonic" relationship between church and state: when the education of the Russia's citizens is at issue, the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church endeavors to establish for itself and its country a key that is appropriate for a twenty-first century pluralistic society.

⁴⁰Kozyrev, <http://www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Russia.htm>.