

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

## The Textbooks as instrument for managing the interaction of secular and religious education

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### Abstract

The matter of the relationship between the secular and the religious is relevant today because of polyconfessionality of Russian society, the increasing role of religion, the humanistic nature of education, and the right of individuals to gain knowledge of the world from different perspectives. The purpose of the article is to consider issues of management of this relationship by the state. This research is interdisciplinary, with the sociocultural approach as the dominant one. To study and describe possible ways and forms of cooperation between faith-based organizations and government, education authorities, we used methods of study, analysis and interpretation of sources, with a key role played by regulatory documents and statutory decisions concerning development and introduction of new theology subjects and disciplines, textbooks, and methodical literature at all levels — schools, colleges, and universities. Research results allow proving that practical importance of introducing new subjects, textbooks and courses with theological content significantly increased with effective management of relationship between the secular and the religious in education. Religious education in modern society becomes an integral part of education helping develop a high level of culture and improve spiritual growth. Religious culture has high educational potential. Knowledge of foundations of traditional Russian religions promotes understanding, preserves and strengthens inter-ethnic and intercultural relations of all Russian citizens.

*Key words: management, textbooks, theological content, sociocultural approach.*

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### Introduction

Today, religion tends to return to the educational space of Russia, for which the fact of violently interrupted religious tradition has been distinctive. Today, the government and faith-based organizations in Russia are doing their utmost to remedy the situation, to effectively organize the interplay between religious and secular

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education, and to expand public life with religious culture and education. The management of relations between religious and secular education is the focus of government institutions. **The relevance** of the inclusion of a religious component in the content of modern secular education in Russia in the form of introduction of new subjects, development of new textbooks and methodical literature, educational activities, the use of different forms and ways of cooperation between government institutions and faith-based organizations are driven by trends in the development of a multicultural society in our country, a multinational and multiconfessional state, the need to solve relevant issues of socialization of youth (Vodenko, 2018; Osipov, 2019; Sorokin, 2018; Zhuravsky, 2014; Taylor, 2011).

The necessity to build a coherent and unified system of religious and theological education has become an urgent need for the Russian society. And it must be a system, not just disparate elements. They should be interconnected, and only then can the system ensure that this type of education is effectively taught for each of its levels — primary school, general education, university education, vocational education, home schooling. In terms of content, this kind of education should be provided with new learning kits, manuals, and educational textbooks.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The purpose of this research is to study the problem of management of relationship between secular and religious components in the content of modern domestic education in the process of development and creation of new textbooks and methodical literature (learning kits) of theological nature, and in the process of providing them with an appropriate regulatory framework.

### **Literature review**

Currently, there are trends in increasing the influence of religion on the humanization of social life in the world, the growing role of theological (theological) education in the development, socialization and adaptation of the individual in today's rapidly changing world. According to a number of experts, these trends suggest the actualization of desecularization processes that are characteristic of the world community as a whole today (Taylor, 2011; Bainbridge, 2017; Berger, 2014; Cox 2016; Segesser, 2018; Taylor, 2017)

### **Methodology**

The analysis of scientific discourse and reflection of scientists and teachers-practitioners on the problem of research is carried out using a set of theoretical methods. The interdisciplinary nature of this study allows addressing the problem thoroughly and comprehensively, based on a sociocultural approach. In the study of the problem, methods of complex and system-oriented analysis of necessary sources on the problem, and methods of scientific discourse of scholars and its interpretation were used to supplement the primary materials of the initial analysis with provisions on sociocultural features of relationship between secular and religious components, and with processes of management thereof.

**Problem statement.** With a religious component introduced to the content of education, and new textbooks and learning kits developed in this area, the issues of nature of the introduced subjects, the allocation of basics for

the selection of their content and methodological support are still the most important issues for Russian education. Russia is a secular state and secularism implies recognition of the value of the freedom of religion, conscience, opinion and thought and the actual existence thereof in public relations. At the same time, knowledge about religions in the education system should be taught in accordance with general educational criteria, in an undenominational version, as a developing knowledge (Bezrogov, 2020).

The issues of managing the relationship between secular and religious components in modern domestic education are resolved on the basis of the adopted laws and regulations and documents of state bodies that define guidelines and approaches to the identification of the content of the religious component when it is included in secular education, and that regulate the issues of their methodical support. Such documents include the following: the Federal Targeted Programme “Strengthening the unity of the Russian nation and ethnic and cultural development of the peoples of Russia (2014-2030)”, the Youth Strategy Concept, the educational standards of middle level (school), the concept of the subject area “Fundamentals of spiritual and moral culture of peoples of the Russian Federation”, state educational standard for higher professional education and program for Theology. All these documents are aimed at strengthening the unity of the multinational people of Russia (the Russian nation), harmonizing inter-ethnic relations and civil unity, promoting intra-group understanding in the country, and establishing the atmosphere of trust and harmony. Spiritual and moral education, which is the subject of new educational areas and disciplines and is capable of solving these issues involves communicating values and ethical standards to schoolchildren and students, and “appropriation” of this knowledge by them. The scientific knowledge taught in general education institutions and universities and in community colleges should be supplemented today with knowledge reflecting other ways of its acquiring, others ways of learning the world, different worldviews, including religious and theological perspectives. Thus, for example, the introduction of theological studies in secular school education, the development of textbooks, which are now called “Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” or the subject area of spiritual and moral culture, culture of religions that are traditional for Russia takes place within the framework of a cultural approach include cultural content and are based on the intersection of social philosophy, political science, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy. Such an approach to the content of the subject area of spiritual and moral culture and textbooks in this area has wide opportunities for forming the pillars of cultural literacy of schoolchildren and students, tolerance in the context of multinational and polyconfessional Russian society, and forms cultural and value-based directions of different worldview systems. The space of culture can create conditions for the initial communication of the sense and meaning of values of secular ethics and religious cultures to learners. The field of culture creates the spiritual bond on which the new subject is built.

However, it should be noted that the development of such disciplines of school theological content is new for Russian education and today it is unlikely that there is another such subject in school or theology course at universities, such as theology universities, which are seen as extremely popular and at the same time extremely problematic. Since the beginning of the 1990s, discussions have been held in Russian society of whether theological subjects are needed in modern secular school, and if yes, then in what form and to what extent. The experiment with introduction of a subject with theological content to schools (“Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”) that was conducted from 2012, first in the 21st region of the country, proved the effectiveness of this course. In 2014, this subject was introduced as compulsory course in all schools.

The subject of “Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” is meant to communicate knowledge about religions, their values and traditions as part of the world civilizational culture, and it is educational in nature and is taught as a developmental knowledge. It is assumed that this knowledge will spark the schoolchildren's interest in culture, the desire to learn more about it, to understand thoughts and feelings of believers, and to form trust and pacificism. The course of secular ethics is not considered as opposed to religious foundations, it is based on the understanding that people of different worldviews share the world and must find their meeting points, and work out common moral rules of conduct. "The Golden Rule of Morality" — "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the moral law of life and human civilization. Schoolchildren must learn to live in a multinational polyconfessional world, which our world is today. These are the goals and objectives of this training course. So, textbooks of this subject will address reflect the aforementioned theses in their content.

And what happens in higher school, in the context of theological education? It is represented in universities by the “Theology” subject implemented in the context of secular education. The content of theology corresponds to the tasks of theological education, however the principle of secularism of the state tends to adjust its goals and objectives. Compared to theological departments of foreign universities, (Universities and Theology. Experience of modern Europe, 2015), in Russia, it does not set out to train clerics. Like the school training course, theological education in universities is educational in nature and aims at the formation of personnel in the field of inter-confessional relations and state-confessional relations. Thus, theology in this form does not violate the principles of freedom of conscience and equality of rights of believers and atheists. From this perspective, it is similar to theology in European universities (Vykhovanets, 2017) where it is distinguished by its critical nature, and the critical nature will bring it together with religious studies. According to van Troostwijk, European academic theology is an interdisciplinary field of research based on the modern methods of psychosociology and literary studies (Universities and Theology. Experience of modern Europe. 2015).

## **Results**

Study of a problem of development and teaching of new courses, disciplines and textbooks of religious content, experience of their implementation in foreign and secular domestic education, understanding of the most important problems of the introduced subjects relating to content and methodological support make it possible to draw the following conclusions:

- The most effective approach to the development of new subjects and textbooks related to the sphere of religion in modern Russian education is a cultural approach, with a non-confessional and educational nature of the knowledge taught
- Multicultural competence is the result of school subjects and university theology. It includes knowledge, interests, needs, values, qualities, experience of social norms and rules of behavior that are important in life and in interaction with people of different cultures, nationalities, and beliefs. Schoolchildren must realize that every culture is important and makes its contribution to the general treasury of human civilizational culture
- When selecting the content and choosing the methodical support of new textbooks, it is important to take into account the principle of age adequacy of learners — schoolchildren or students. The content for textbooks and

manuals and the methodical support material, — means, forms and methods, technologies of teaching should be selected in accordance with this principle.

### **Discussions**

Modern Western education institutions in most countries of the world provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge about the history of religion and the impact of religion on the development of society, and the role of religion in the life of modern people. Knowledge of world religious traditions is important to an educated person because these traditions are still alive and many people are connected to them to varying degrees. In the implementation of subjects related to the teaching of religion at all levels of education, issues relating to the purpose of their teaching, content, forms and methods of education, and evaluation of results play an important role; the same holds for significance of religious education for socialization and education of students, formation of their morality, values, communicative competencies and multiculturalism, commitment to dialogue (Learning the international experience of teaching the knowledge of religion in public schools: “Whosereligion?“, 2015).

According to Russian and foreign researchers, the fact that schoolchildren of different nationalities, faiths, ethnic groups study together in the same classroom for a long time contributes to the development of tolerance and multicultural competence in them. They get to know each other, they have trust-based relations among themselves, they understand that the other is not an enemy, but just a person with different worldviews. Collaborative learning helps to create good feelings, trust and pacificism in children. For this, they are helped by textbook materials from new subjects and new disciplines (Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools, 2007; Kozyrev, 2005).

What are the implementation techniques for new subjects? What should underlie the choice of content of the relevant textbooks? The answers to these questions should be sought in taking into account the principles of scientificity and age adequacy, and the cultural context of new subjects. What does that mean? The content of new subjects, textbooks and manuals is selected from the standpoint of cultural approach. It is the space of religious and secular culture that allows to take into account the principles of worldview pluralism, secularism and scientificity which do not conflict with the presentation of knowledge of religious culture, unless this knowledge features a religious aspect. The basics of religious culture are taught within the framework of historical knowledge, and the teacher does not dominate the learners with his worldview beliefs and attitudes. Whatever views the teacher holds, he should be in a neutral position, not trying to turn learners to them.

The cultural approach helps to reveal religious culture through history, language, monuments of architecture, literature, art, music and so on. Importance is given to the re-creation and description of the way of life, regimen, daily routine, behavior of representatives of a particular cultural religious tradition. From the lessons and materials of the textbook, the learners will get to know the interior of temples and sacred structures, the appearance and content of sacred texts and books, the rituals and ceremonies. Textbook examples of introduction and explanation of religious meanings and values presented in the everyday aspect of life of different peoples inhabiting Russia and representing different religious cultures are of particular interest. Schoolchildren and students learn about the everyday life of believers, the attributes and signs of their life and behavior, and learn to understand why those people act in one way or another, what motives lie beneath their actions, and what principles they are guided in life. Only then, both the behavior and motivation of these people

are becoming clear. What is cross for the Orthodox and Muslims, how Jewish worship services are held, in what kinds of buildings the services of Protestants are held, why Catholic priests can not have a family, etc. What prohibitions and norms of life do they observe, what people and acts are righteous to them, what do they consider to be a virtue, and what do they criticize. Educational materials and textbooks will not only familiarize, tell, describe, or present, but also explain why different cultures live this way, and not another. What they have common with other cultures, and what distinguishes them from all. And this does not mean bad or good, this means that different cultures have their right to exist and in order for humanity to survive in this world, it must find grounds for dialogue, try and learn to negotiate, but not be at feud.

Ethnographic and sociological approaches will also take their place: they are used to describe the life of social groups, communities and peoples today (Sorokin, 2018) This means, teachers can rely on the rich ethnographic material in addition to the materials of textbooks, use it in the application of active forms of education - in projects, excursions, trips or visits — in extra-curricular educational work. And even if both students and teachers are not sufficiently familiar with ethnographic material, they have many opportunities to express and implement their professional abilities and creativity to the fullest extent.

Taking into account the principle of age adequacy in the development of new textbooks is also crucial (Learning the international experience of teaching the knowledge of religion in public schools: “Whosereligion?”, 2015).. Culture as a subject requires special means and methods of presenting and teaching the material. Religious culture is not familiar to schoolchildren or even to Russian teachers. In primary school, this subject requires a particular tolerance. Because of their age, younger schoolchildren need peculiar ways of presenting the material of religious culture to them. The path of consistent learning religious cultures in the context of history, language, art, painting, architecture, lifestyle of their people is like the path of a traveler who, when getting into an unfamiliar area and to other people, will begin to learn its essence and forms slowly and inquisitively. And this path must be colorful and fascinating. In addition, the appropriation of cultural values must be active and practical, otherwise these values will not become significant for learners. The activity approach, as both cultural and axiological, is the main in teaching new subjects.

## **Conclusion**

Management of the development of new learning kits and textbooks for subjects of theological studies for schools and universities is an important part of teaching support. Today we are talking about the inclusion of electronic textbooks, additional electronic test materials, workbooks for schoolchildren and training aids for individual work of students. The need to develop this kind of educational literature is dictated by the fact that modern Russian education at all levels — primary, secondary and higher education — must be built taking into account the principle of historical continuity, which will ensure the preservation and development of a national culture for each new generation. Religious culture is a part of Russia's traditional religions that are the national peculiarities of the peoples of Russia, and its wealth. Learning diverse religious traditions and values will help to lay the foundations of civic consciousness, the Russian identity, to form spirituality and high moral qualities in future generations, the ability to communicate with people of different worldviews.

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