



7th International Conference on Intercultural Education “Education, Health and ICT for a Transcultural World”, EDUHEM 2016, 15-17 June 2016, Almeria, Spain

The Education Activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Contemporary Transcultural Space of Russia

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Abstract

The paper provides an analysis of the process of transformation of the educational activities of the Orthodoxy in the circumstances of the development of the transcultural information space in terms of clericalization and secularization (as exemplified by contemporary Russia); comprises a detailed study of the changes in the educational environment, which have taken place due to the increasing activity of the Church in post-Soviet Russia and the support of the Government; and states the correlation between this trend and the processes of the transcultural information environment that has made the religion secularization possible. This paper discusses the main attitudes of the supporters and opponents of secularization and clericalization both in the Russian Federation, and the wider world. In our understanding, there is a tendency towards secularization in the modern cultural and informational environment. It does not necessarily mean that religion is disappearing; we can see now the rise and fall of the clericalization processes which is a specific situation against the aforementioned general tendency. A renewed interest in religion in the Russian Federation today clearly means that the Russian Orthodox Church is penetrating into the sphere of education. The supporters of this process advocate moral and religious improvement of the personality and the maintenance of mental aspects of education. The opponents of comprehensive school clericalization take an ideological approach; they believe that religious education in secular schools violates the constitutional requirement of the ideological pluralism.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of EDUHEM 2016.

Keywords: the Russian Federation; secularization; clericalization; school; education; the Russian Orthodox Church; information environment;

1. Introduction

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Under current conditions, every researcher of the present religious situation has an opportunity to choose from two opposing paradigms:

First is an attempt to identify a social activity of the Russian Orthodox Church with its general tasks concerning the spiritual enlightenment of human soul. The inability to differentiate between the church's social role and the role of religious service leads to the appearance of shallow and sometimes trivial judgments;

Second is an attempt to differentiate between the Orthodox faith and the Orthodox Church (the idea is not new: "In Russia the God is without the Church"). In this case, we face the inability to understand the essence of faith institutionalization and religion in the social environment.

Consequently, the orthodox religious factor has a certain geopolitical meaning, for example, concerning the canonical territory.

2. Objective, methods and stages of the study

The objective of the study is to analyze the controversial influence of the present religious situation in Russia on the awareness-raising and educational functions of the Orthodoxy including in the new informational environment. The methodological basis of this study includes objectivism (independent assessment of the opposing parties' opinions concerning religious situation but without supporting any of them); case study (awareness-raising and educational activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the context of present informational environment); stratification approach (distinguishing between different levels of the Church's policy relating to educational activity). This paper examines such stages of the present educational activity of the Russian Orthodox Church as initial, middle and final stages.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 A conflict of interests and positions of the parties

We understand secularization as any form of release from religious institutions, and a decreasing of the impact of religions on all aspects of people's life and society; clericalization is an opposite tendency, namely, the increasing impact of the Church and religion on people's lives and society. Secularization has become the dominant tendency during the Age of Enlightenment and in the Modern Era; by the 20th century, the number of atheists grew from 0.2% to 21% (Sotirova, 1996). The "Norm of Secularization" was higher in the countries that were the first to adopt the Bourgeois Modernization. Even the Orthodox bishops cannot deny the fact of total secularization. Patriarch Alexy II stated in his speech at the Assembly of Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2004: "In all the countries of the Christian world the last century was a time of further derogation from Christianity, attacks on Christianity, and the time of the triumph of secularization" (Alexy II, Patriarch, 2004).

The secularization paradigm assumes transition from the traditional religious dominance (the primacy of the Church in the leading aspects of social life) to modern general cultural dominance (many channels of desecularized culture, including mass channels, provide necessary spiritual replenishment). A natural decrease in the quality of "spiritual production" causes social emotional distress of the restoration and even apocalyptic nature associated with the loss of the norm, ideals and traditions.

The analysis of the historical experience of the previously dominant religions on secularization shows that traditional religions demonstrate two models of behavior:

Adaptation (acculturation, updating to some degree) of the Church to the new conditions;

Protest, resistance to coming changes by implementing fundamentalist projects.

The Catholic Church, for example, demonstrates the first model of behavior (its defined and implemented theology of social action, social service and a pathos of sociality have existed for quite some time). With the Church adopting such a position, a secular state can take advantage of its positive potential relating to national and cultural self-identification; saving significant cultural traditions; strengthening the collective identity, preserving and consolidating that which is critically important for the society and its survival.

According to the adopted doctrine of religious and political relations, the State "labels religions by the degree of the civilization identity and historical experience of collaboration" (for example, in the Russian Federation, these are

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