# CHRISTIAN VALUES IN SPIRITUAL AND MORAL UPBRINGING OF STUDENTS

**Irina Igorevna Ushatikova**[*1]**, Natalya Mikhailovna Nesova**[2]**,
Elena Evgenyevna Demidova**[3]**, Olga Yuryevna Kopylova**[3] **and
Aleksey Valeryevich Novikov**[4, 5]

[1] *Elabuga Institute (branch) of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazanskaya str. 89, Elabuga, 423604, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation*
[2] *Peoples Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Miklukho-Maklaya St. 6, Moscow, 117198, Russian Federation*
[3] *Moscow Humanitarian Economic University, Leninsky Prospekt, house 8, building 16, Moscow, 119049, Russia*
[4] *Federal state institution 'Scientific-Research Institute Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia', ul. Narvskaya 15A, Moscow, 125130, Russia*
[5] *Russian Customs Academy, Komsomolyskiy pr. 4, Lyubercy, 140009, Russia*

## Abstract

The issue of spiritual and moral upbringing of student-age youth is quite topical for the contemporary Science and practice. The article substantiates the necessity of spiritual and moral upbringing of the young generation on the basis of Christian values, and highlights as well as the gained experience in the implementation of the Christian values into education system of higher educational institutions. The purpose of the present study is to establish psychological patterns and mechanisms of spiritual and moral upbringing of the student's personality through inclusion and acceptance of Christian values. The objective of the research involves the solution of the following tasks: carrying out psychological, theoretical and methodological analysis of the problem on spiritual and moral upbringing of the personality; providing a system of psychological and pedagogical practices designed to promote spiritual and moral upbringing of the student's personality; and developing and testing a training program of spiritual formation of the student' personality. The authors have proposed the formation mechanisms of spiritual values of the student's personality, and developed psychological training program to form spirituality in the student's personality.

*Keywords:* potential, ethics, formation, psychological training, criteria

## 1. Introduction

In present-day conditions of society development, the issue of upbringing highly moral human beings among the younger generation is particularly relevant. However, the current state of spirituality in the society, unfortunately, is going

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[*]E-mail: feedback1206@yandex.ru

through a crisis, when instead of the true values to the younger generation are imposed the values that have a detrimental effect on their mind and psyche.

As noted by A. Maslow, "the goal of the humanistic studies was defined as the perception and knowledge of the good, the beautiful, and the true" [1]. Christian altruism is the pinnacle of humanism, based on sacrificial love for one's neighbour: to love is to forget about yourself. This is evidenced by the words of Jesus Christ: "Whoever would save his soul, shall lose it, whoever loses it for my sake will save it" (Matthew 10.39). Saying this, Christ refers to love for others. Christian love is the only solution to life's contradictions, it overcomes the rigid boundaries of isolation, self-centeredness, selfishness, implies forgiveness, compassion, mercy, and the path to true freedom from evil.

It is proven scientifically that a deep interest in others, mutual assistance, which is preached by religion, gives spiritual strength. Psychologists, who have worked with prisoners of war and victims of disasters, note that crucial point in their recovery is compassion, "recovery through mutual aid" [2].

Research conducted by P. Benson has proved that the believing students are characterized by inherent highest level of humanism and altruism compared to non-believers [3]. According to other study of G. Gallup Jr., 37% of believers, who attended Church once a year or less often, and 76% of those who visited Church every week, noted that they think about their obligations to the poor [4].

Research carried out by M.J. Donahue [5] has shown that religion acts as a source of resilience, a buffer against dishonest behaviour such as use of psychoactive substances, promiscuity, violence and theft [6]. According to G.L. Ream, religion has a particularly strong influence on individual behaviour in communities with a high proportion of residents, who regularly attend religious services, presumably because religion adds legitimacy at the community level, as well as establishes prohibitions on individual behaviour incompatible with religious prohibitions [7]. Young people accept various religious beliefs for personal gain which religion and associated spirituality can offer them. Being engaged in religion, young people seek a sense of belonging and positive energy from relationship with their peers and adults in the religious community, as well as connection with God, that provides a sense of purpose and spiritual significance [8].

At the beginning of the XXIst century psychotherapists have finally made sure in what always was being proved by a humanistic religion: there is no better remedy for the soul, except of love, which changes the whole emotional sphere of the human psyche. The one who loves rejoices, but one who hates, suffers and multiplies evil [9]. The Christian faith, calling for forgiveness ('bless those who curse you') and a sacrificial non selfish love for one's neighbour, stands against the augmentation of evil and aggression in human souls, as well as has a powerful force to counteract destructiveness [10].

According to P.M. Granovskaya, in case of doubt about the morality of their behaviour or deviations from accepted norms of morality, people draw primarily to their inner voice, conscience, and intensively reflexes. This triggers a whole chain of psychic phenomena such as awareness and experience of sin,

suffering and possible catharsis, the formation of attitudes to moral perfection [11].

According to the interpretation of this phenomenon by the adherents of the humanistic concept in Psychology (H. Kohut, V. Frankl, E. Fromm, etc.), morality and conscience are core formation of psychological structure of the person's spirituality, person's ability to the authentic free self-determination and self-regulation, in opposition to social imperatives and taboos, biological instincts, if they contradict this attitude [12].

As noted by Y.M. Zen'ko, the pangs of conscience are a psychological rod of remorse and redemption, which should bring person to affection, enlightenment, love and benevolence [13]. Sincere repentance, a huge inner desire for atonement of his own sins, possible experience of catharsis, and as a consequence, the cleansing of conscience make a person kinder, happier, and more harmonious.

According to E.A. Nilsen, Science has not found factors naturally emanating from the human earthly nature, such as morality, conscience, benevolence, charity and brotherly love. Therefore Science is compelled to appeal to the religious and mystical factors. Moral is so tightly connected with religion that it is impossible to separate them, because the depths and tops of morality are reached through religious and mystical perception, love is psychologically akin to religion [14].

Spiritual development is described by D. MacKay and J. Keiller as "creating the spiritual values' framework for the learners, which regulates their personal behaviour ... develops understanding of shared and agreed values of society and the changes in society values", and that "when there is disagreement, there are contentious issues" that require from learners "developing an opinion on different views" [15].

The formation of the spiritual world in students through Christian values is quite a challenging task, since these are people, who already have to some extent formed worldview, belief, and ideals. Sometimes we have to deal with a student contingent which is characterized by low spiritual level. Here we should look for other ways of influence on the personality – those that will force students to think, look around, and reconsider their views and behaviour.

The issue of spiritual and moral upbringing of students is very relevant to contemporary science and practice. This issue became the subject of many studies and their scope is continuously extended. According to E.T. Smirnova, spirituality is a general cultural phenomenon, which contains in itself not only abstract theoretical values and ideals, but also conscience, truth, and beauty of doings [16].

In our opinion, spirituality is a challenging mental phenomenon, manifestation of the inner world of the personality and his cognitive structure full of inherent attributes. The spiritual world of each person is quite individual. Spirituality is the property that makes a person creative and attractive to others. This concerns not only knowledge, experience, and sociability.

Russian scientists (A.I. Zelichenko and L.N. Tarasova), who have studied the process of spiritual development, believe that the successful development of the spirituality in the personality is provided by the early genesis of the individual, spiritual attitude of the educators and certainty of their ideals, by the development of spiritual values, religious consciousness and the self-actualization of the personality. This is a complicated psychological phenomenon of self-actualization of the personality, his inner perception, the adherence to culture, humanization, as well as rooting into it, and perception it as own heritage [17, 18].

Thus, under the moral and spiritual upbringing and formation of the student we understand the state of spiritual values, religious consciousness and self-actualization of the student's personality, development of his spiritual priorities, and substantiation of the value system that should form the foundation of his life, and be at the forefront of the whole process of his creative labour. At that, the analysis of research and current state of education and upbringing at the universities lead us to the conclusion concerning the necessity to select a historically justified way of forming in young people high spirituality based on Christian moral values.

## 2. Methods

The study was conducted over the 4th semester and involved 61 second-year university students. At the beginning and the end of the semester a psychological analysis was carried out, according to which the diagnostic was put, using the following research methods:

- questionnaire survey aimed at determining the level of student's spirituality (developed by the author);
- diagnostic methods, which included diagnostics of personal and situational anxiety (the Spielberger-Khanin's test); the level of empathy (V.V. Boiko's test for empathy); level of religiousness (Y.V. Shcherbatykh's test to define the structure of individual religiosity); test to determine the importance of material values (K.V. Kharsky's test of 'Hierarchy of personal values'); and intelligence level test (G. Eysenck's verbal test of intelligence) [19, 20].

In the course of the research, correction work was carried out on spiritual and moral upbringing of students through their spiritual development that was based on Christian values.

## 3. Results

The upbringing of spiritual and moral potential of modern students on the basis of Christian moral values is a rather complicated process. This is evidenced by the results of the work with students. In the course of the test, we have carried out a preliminary survey aimed at determining the levels of students' spirituality (Table 1). We have also conducted diagnostics of personal and situational anxiety,

levels of empathy, religiosity, and intelligence, as well as the significance of material assets.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of spirituality levels.

| Level of spirituality | Spirituality level characteristics |
|---|---|
| Low | The student is not always affirming spiritual values of being in his words and deeds, is trying to evade the acceptance of spiritual values in life, randomly accumulates his knowledge about spiritual, cultural and religious life of the country, dedicates his work to the spiritual idea only occasionally; when personality relates personally significant values with the spiritual values, he considers the latter only under favourable conditions. |
| Moderate | The student is always affirming spiritual values of being in his words though not always in his deeds, takes spiritual values without a proper desire, enriches his knowledge about spiritual, cultural and religious life of the country under the guidance of a mentor or under favourable conditions; in case of favourable conditions, the personality dedicates his work to the spiritual idea; he experiences difficulties when correlating values important for himself with spiritual ones. |
| High | The student asserts the spiritual values of being in his words and deeds, is committed to accept spiritual values and embodies them in life, perceives information about spiritual, cultural and religious life of the country on its own initiative, sees the meaning of his life in the worship to the spiritual idea (selfless service), coordinates values which are important for himself with the spiritual ones giving preference for spiritual values. |

At the final stage of the research we have developed a 'Training program for the development of student's spirituality', which aims at giving students the knowledge of fundamental human values, promoting awareness of importance of adherence of young people to modern Christian spiritual tradition forming the best human qualities in the youth subculture.

The training program pursues the following objectives:
- acquainting students with Christian spiritual and moral values and examples of Christian culture;
- promoting mastery of the person's upbringing mechanisms on the basis of Christian moral values in the context of family environment and contemporary educational institutions;
- fostering a sense of love for the highest values and the basics of being, instilling moral virtues and the desire for the manifestation of moral behaviour;
- deepening interest in the Christian moral values and the desire to implement them practically in professional activities and personal life.

**Table 2.** Structure and major psychological and pedagogical training tools in the frameworks of the 'Training program for the development of student's spirituality'.

| Module No. | The title of the training module | The basic psychological and pedagogical training tools |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Introduction to the work | 1. Familiarizing with the rules of the T-group. <br> 2. Creating an atmosphere of psychological safety. <br> 3. Psychological gymnastics. |
| 2. | Value orientations of the student | 1. Projective drawing 'Me and my place in the world of people'. <br> 2. Role-playing game 'Bad people - Good people. What's the difference?'. <br> 3. Business game 'Draw up a code of conduct for the $XXI^{st}$ century'. <br> 4. Exercises to remove 'inhibitions' in the muscles and increase the level of safety in the T-group. |
| 3. | The spiritual upbringing of the student | 1. Role-playing game 'Me in the past, present, and future. What's the difference?' <br> 2. Psychological practicum 'What am I most proud of in my past? What was in my life such that it would be worth living differently?'. <br> 3. Exercise 'The empty chair – my friends and enemies in the past'. <br> 4. Brainstorming 'Definition of state social support directions of student's youth as the future creator of the country'. <br> 5. Exercises to remove 'inhibitions' in the muscles, manifestation of expression through motion. |
| 4. | Religious values of the student | 1. Socially and perceptually focused training of personal growth 'I am in the eyes of others. Can I be trusted?'. <br> 2. Panel discussion 'Person who actively believes in God – who is he? Past, present, and future'. <br> 3. Business game 'If the Holy Book was written by me'. <br> 4. Exercises to remove 'inhibitions' in the muscles, manifestation of expression through motion. |
| 5. | The religious consciousness of the student | 1. Discussion: 'Religiously conscious person: 'for' and 'against'. <br> 2. Brainstorming 'Who am I, a grain of sand, drop of water, the breeze – am I responsible for the future?'. <br> 3. Business game 'Conscience. Is it needed in the $XXI^{st}$ century?'. <br> 4. Exercises to remove 'inhibitions' in the muscles, manifestation of expression through motion. |
| 6. | Final lesson. The discussion of the training results | 1. Discussion on topic: 'Prior I started working in the T-group. After finishing work in T-group. What has changed in me?' <br> 2. Exercises to remove 'inhibitions' in the muscles, manifestation of expression through motion. |

The training program includes the formation of a value system as the basis of spiritual development of the personality, the accentuation of religious values as an important factor of spiritual development of the personality, the accentuation of the religious consciousness as the essential component of personality's spirituality.

The training of the student's spiritual development is divided structurally into 7 training modules. Each training module included specially designed original exercises and existing modified training exercises which were suitable to the intended purpose. We used role-playing and business games, mini-discussions, personal growth training exercises, and bodily-based training exercises. The list of modules as well as psychology and pedagogical training tools for each of them are given in Table 2.

Based on the results of psychological training we have formed a view that the personality is at the stage of spiritual development, firstly, when it sees the meaning in what corresponds to its spiritual ideals and capabilities, and secondly, when it has developed appropriate personality traits, knowledge and skills to achieve set goals and realize itself in its spiritual formation.

We have carried out correlation analysis of the obtained results to establish the relationship between the studied characteristics. In particular we have revealed the correlation and inter-dependence between the development level of spirituality and personality characteristics such as intellect, empathy, and levels of reactive and personal anxiety, religiosity, as well as the attitude to material values (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Significant indicators of the studied characteristics
(based on the results of the correlation analysis).

|        | PA     | SA     | SL     | EL     | RL     | MA     | IL     |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| **PA** | 1.000  | 0.761  | -0.708 | -0.641 | -0.564 | 0.640  | -0.383 |
| **SA** | 0.761  | 1.000  | -0.715 | -0.572 | -0.498 | 0.583  | -0.345 |
| **SL** | -0.708 | -0.715 | 1.000  | 0.587  | 0.743  | -0.659 | 0.476  |
| **EL** | -0.641 | -0.572 | 0.587  | 1.000  | 0.557  | -0.574 | 0.587  |
| **RL** | -0.563 | -0.498 | 0.743  | 0.557  | 1.000  | -0.623 | 0.588  |
| **MA** | 0.640  | 0.583  | -0.659 | -0.574 | -0.623 | 1.000  | -0.499 |
| **IL** | -0.383 | -0.345 | 0.476  | 0.587  | 0.588  | -0.499 | 1.000  |

Legend: PA – personal anxiety; SA – situational anxiety; SL – spirituality level; EL – empathy level; RL – religiosity level; MA – material assets; IL – intelligence level

The results of the correlation analysis have shown the existence of dependence and inter-influence between the development level of spirituality and intelligence, development level of spirituality and empathy, development level of spirituality and the level of situational anxiety, development level of spirituality and the level of personal anxiety, development level of spirituality and the level of religiosity, as well as development level of spirituality and material assets.

At that, the dependence of personal and situational anxiety as well as the significance of material assets on the level of spirituality and religiosity is of the opposite nature, i.e. the higher the levels of spirituality and religiosity, the lower

is the level of personal and situational anxiety inherent in a person, and the less are important for him material assets. At the same time, the level of intelligence and empathy is positively associated with the level of spirituality and religiosity, i.e. the higher the levels of spirituality and religiosity, the higher the levels of empathy and intelligence.

We have also compared the distribution of the levels of student's spirituality before and after implementation of the spirituality training program. Based on diagnostics results it can be stated that the proportion of high level of spirituality among the students as a result of implementation of the training program has increased by 20% that illustrates the effectiveness of the used program.

After completing the training program, the students usually shared their reflections concerning studied concepts in their essays, where they were pondering painful issues such as 'Good and evil: the opposition and coexistence', 'Moral foundation of the family and the Christian tradition,' 'Forgiveness in human life', 'Doing good selflessly', 'Eternal values of life', and the like.

Students' reflections support the idea that the person is a moral human being as much as he thinks about these issues and seeks to get an answer to them. At that, Christian morality becomes the basis for shaping the spiritual world of the personality, the inner core, which promotes the ascent of a person along the spiritual vertical to the highest perfection. After all, this is the most important task of upbringing and education.

## 4. Discussion - the advantage of the Christian spiritual and moral values over secular morality

In general, based on the works of researchers (L.A. Rapatskaya, V.G. Alexandrov, A. Kracher, K.A. Johnson, J.N. Hook, D.E. Davis, et al.), it should be noted that the extreme urgency of the problem on spiritual and moral upbringing of personality based on Christian values today is conditioned by the advantage of the Christian model of education over the secular values. The advantage of the Christian spiritual and moral values over secular morality consists in the following:

1. Christian values are the most stable, versatile, not subjected to socio-political influences, whereas secular morality is variable, often depends on fashion and aspirations for imitation of media personalities, etc. [21].
2. In Christianity there is always moral categorical imperative, which focuses on the internal creation, the perfection of the soul that fosters sustainable moral qualities and beliefs [22]. For example, this is the belief to give up drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco: 'I will not do that because it is killing my soul'. While secular morality explains: '...because it is harmful', which hardly is convincing. Therefore, Christian ethical norms (as opposed to secular ones) do not look imposed from outside because they are addressed to the conscience, act as internal beliefs of a person, as the realization of his freedom.

3. Christian values as the framework of human values and integral component of religious culture are the core of the spiritual culture of the nation [23]. Religion puts very specific obligations to human morality: fulfilment of the commandments. Therefore, Christian values are the basis of spiritual culture in the family and social environment, where the formation of personality takes place [24].

4. Christianity reveals the comprehension of the genuine humanism in contrast to the secular humanism, which fosters consumerism, and substitutes the Creator by human [25]. The Christian humanism recognizes the human dignity as image and likeness of God, as the highest form of God's creation. Exactly the Christian humanism, where the Creator is the centre of entire Universe, should be the basis of upbringing.

5. The advantage of Christian morality over secular morality consists in the fact that Christianity has a single source and the carrier of ethical norms - the Lord. That is why the Christian morality is absolute, needs no proof like a secular morality. Provisions of Christian morality are permanent and measured by the common standards that come from the Creator to His creation and facilitate the acquisition by the person of likeness to God, and therefore they cannot be replaced [26, 27].

However, we should note that Russian society is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and largely either unchurched or atheistic. In its essence this society remains secular, therefore Christian (religious in general) values should not be imposed artificially. Otherwise Christian moral values may be rejected. Nevertheless, regardless of origin, personal characteristics, religious commitment or atheism, humanistic potential is inherent in each of person especially when people are still young, studying at the university, and more open to changes. Therefore, we need to look for interaction forms at the higher education system to develop Christian values in students.

## 5. Conclusions

A modern higher educational institution should become a centre of spirituality and morality, where a person gradually ascents to the spiritual heights, where scientific thought is closely intertwined with spiritual experience of humanity, whose true personification are Christian values.

At the same time, under the spiritual and moral upbringing and development of the student's personality we should comprehend the state of his spiritual values, religious consciousness and his self-actualization as a personality, the development of his spiritual priorities, substantiation of a value system that should form the foundation of his life and come to the forefront of the whole process of his creative labour. The essence of Christian based spiritual development consists in the upbringing and education of the inner man, in his spiritual perfection, whose ideals are value foundations of Christianity, enshrined in the universal eternal values of being.

The conducted study has revealed a relationship between the spirituality development level of the student and important personal qualities such as level of intelligence, empathy, anxiety, and attitude to material values. At that, after implementation of the proposed training program, the proportion of highly moral students has increased by 20% that proves the efficiency of the proposed training program of spirituality development in university students. Thus, the humanistic potential of religious faith contributes to personal progress harmonizing person's psychics.

**Acknowledgment**

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