
MODERN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS THE BASIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

Modern education is spreading beyond national boundaries and attracting an increasing number of people with various cultural perspectives. Educational institutions operate in a complex internally contradictory polyethnic and polycultural environment. A few aspects of the problem are considered in this paper. The main of them are, first, the government and religious organizations joining efforts in the sphere of education in order to develop spirituality and, second, determination of the acceptable limit of influence exercised by religious education on the general educational process in state educational institutions. The article identifies the role of modern education in the current multiconfessional environment and in the context of imbalance between interests involved. Implementation of religious education in the system of general secondary schools in Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, and France is considered in the paper. The European context of providing religious education within the system of multiconfessional education is characterized. The article shows that foreign experience of developing religious education is varied and instructive. In each country, it is based on national cultural and political traditions. Therefore, it is necessary to develop religious education in Russia relying on national culture and traditions of the Russian society. Key characteristics necessary for the conflict-free implementation of religious education in state schools are identified in the article.

Keywords: religion, culture, tolerance, characteristics, educational

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1. Introduction

The reforms carried out in the Russian system of education are failing to overcome the obstacle represented by the stagnation of spiritual culture and morality [1, 2]. Such a situation might be caused, not least of all, by the formalized character of the national education and its isolation from cultural sources - in particular, from religion, its cultural and spiritual legacy [3]. Elements of religious education could become an important factor of influence on the moral, ethical and civil self-consciousness of the younger generation. There are a few examples of the introduction of religious context into the system of state education, but, unfortunately, all of them can be observed in foreign countries, such as Great Britain, Germany, Poland, the USA, Canada, Israel and Saudi Arabia [4, 5].

One of the main reasons why the Russian education system cannot integrate the religious context in a proper way lies in the so-called Soviet legacy (the period when scientific atheism dominated both in the culture and in the society). It is necessary to reform the prototype of the practical worldview that shaped the Russian educational strategy many years ago. Modern humanities should definitely play the leading role in this process. Particularly, this problem can be solved by the means of philosophy of education, religious studies and philosophy of religion [6].

This topic has been given a lot of attention in the Russian scientific, social and cultural communities. Scientists, philosophers, cultural figures and representatives of various religious organizations have focused on this issue [1–4, 6]. However, it should be noted that in the Russian education, there is still no balance between religious and secular interests, which leads to destructive phenomena in the conditions of the multiconfessional environment. Therefore, the objective of this article consists in the research into the place and role of religion in the formation of the cultural and educational context of the development of the modern Russian society.

2. Religious studies in the system of general education schools, developing culture and tolerance

Development of qualities typical of a tolerant person by the means of education is one of the most important tasks of any national education system. Under the national education system as a whole (and under education in particular), hereinafter, we will understand the existing institutional model that combines formal and informal norms, rules and organizations designed to give a person knowledge, skills and other abilities necessary for their professional activities and organization of their life. We consider both secular and religious education in relation to a certain part of the population: children aged 6-14, teenagers and young people aged 18-20, i.e. the group of the younger generation, which is called ‘junior schoolchildren’ (aged 6-10) and ‘middle schoolchildren’ (aged 10-14), as well as ‘senior schoolchildren/applicants’ (aged 14-20).

Over recent years, the problem of developing the culture of tolerance in the younger generation has become especially relevant due to the presence of religious studies courses in the curriculum (such as Christian or Muslim ethics and culture).

Introduction of subjects within the domain of Spirituality and Ethics to general education institutions is necessitated by the decay of spiritual values, degradation of morality and culture, commodification of life and propaganda of violence. One of the purposes of studying these subjects is the development of respectful attitude to representatives of culture and traditions different from one's own, the ability to live and create new things in the modern polycultural and multiconfessional world, and willingness to respect each person's right to freedom of conscience [7, 8]. These key premises build up the culture of tolerance and are especially important for such a multiconfessional country as Russia.

Existence of multiple confessions does not only stimulate at least tolerant and respectful attitude to representatives of different religions in the younger generation but also requires taking into consideration specific conditions in certain regions. Exposing students to various confessions is as important as studying the confessional map of the country since it matters from the perspective of their everyday surroundings, their real-world social contacts and the experience they are gaining, which will determine their individual and social behaviour in the future [5, p. 15].

The necessity of complementing the state education system with moral and spiritual values common to religion is well-recognized in the European countries with established democracy that have enshrined the secular character of the state, education and social upbringing in the legislation. It is no coincidence that in 1997, the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st Century highlighted the importance of teaching the knowledge about religion as the guarantee of social harmony: it is at school that junior, middle and senior schoolchildren should be explained the historical, cultural and religious foundations of different ideologies they encounter in the society, in the places where they live or in their classes. It can be stated that a new generation of people tolerant of religion has emerged. Thus, according to the results of a survey conducted in a number of universities in Russia, when newly enrolled full-time students (young people mostly aged 18-20) were asked the question 'Do you consider yourself a believer?', 40.2% of the respondents chose the option 'I am a believer', 41.3% chose the answer 'I am rather a believer than an unbeliever', whereas only 4.3% said, 'I am an unbeliever' [3]. Therefore, there is an objective social need for developing social skills with respect to religious aspects of social development in young people.

Within a short period of time, the attitude to religion and Church has changed significantly - opinion poll findings regularly show a high level of trust in them (compared to other social institutions). However, it should be noted that the high trust level alone does not totally prevent outbreaks of interreligious hostility. The level of trust indicates that a certain stratum supports 'its own'

religious movement and treats other movements at least neutrally. According to the survey, whereas the majority of respondents have a positive attitude to Orthodox churches registered in Russia, 14.7% of respondents are 'wary' of representatives of Judaism, 15.4% feel the same about Muslims, 23.6% - about Protestants, 21.5% - about representatives of unconventional religions. Meanwhile, 8.4% of respondents declared their 'hostile attitude and confrontational stance' against Judaism and Islam, 11.8% - against new religious movements [3].

The content of subjects within the domain of spirituality and ethics taught in general education institutions is a controversial issue that provokes debates among specialists [9].

In our opinion, the solution to this issue should be guided by the necessity to provide the younger generation with the possibility to make a free conscious choice of their attitude to religion in the future, on the one hand, and the need for development of a positive attitude to the worldviews held by other people, on the other hand. However, despite the enormous spiritual potential of religion, the society cannot but be interested in the development of eternal moral qualities and values reaching out to the spiritual Absolute in the younger generation. It is impossible to counter the negative influence of temptations offered by modern society successfully without relying on a higher, unworldly Authority. We have no illusions that studying religion can become a cure-all for any manifestations of antisocial behaviour, but we are sure that the share of those people who are inclined to such behaviours due to various reasons still grows smaller in the course of the acquisition of spiritual values and norms. Although the idea of such use of religion is not a new one, its validity is proven not by government statistics, but by lives of people that changed radically when they got acquainted with a certain confession.

As we see it, not all teachers should teach religious subjects and deal with the religious upbringing of students. First, it is their social assignment. Second, it should be done professionally, with deep knowledge of various theological disciplines, thus this function should be performed by representatives of religious confessions. Third, it is important to remember about freedom of conscience as the basis for personal mind-set autonomy, which allows everyone to choose their own beliefs independently. It is common knowledge that no one can develop a person's principles, beliefs, interests and priorities for them. Therefore, a conclusion can be made that school education should not perform the role of religious communities that can carry out corresponding work with the younger generation.

It is axiomatic that school is meant to prepare a person for self-sufficient life in society [10, 11]. Nowadays, there are a lot of confessions and religious communities. Virtually in any social institution, one can spot direct or symbolic signs of religious presence. Introducing students to historical and cultural aspects of the traditional religion that dominates in the corresponding region and explaining the deep meaning of religious moral imperatives is what school is intended to do [7, 8, 10, 11]. Schools need to work with religious organizations

to develop special cultural and educational programs. In Russia, such cooperation still seems to be insufficiently effective, since the main access to schools is given only to those confessions that are historically established for specific regions. For example, in Central Russia this is Orthodox Christianity, in the Caucasus, in particular in Chechnya, this is Sunni Islam. At the same time, both Orthodox and Islamic preachers only teach schoolchildren religious doctrines, ignoring the historical, cultural and social context of religion. In this regard, the experience of implementing religious education in the system of general education of European countries could be very useful for Russia.

At the same time, school education has accumulated interesting experience of using different dialogue-oriented, argumentative and creative forms in the educational process that are not marked by the spirit of authoritarian relationships between the teacher and the student, which is the most appropriate type of interaction as far as studies of philosophical and mind-set issues based on certain religious confessions are concerned. Inviting students to take part in discussions and look for solutions in order to inspire them to feel a desire and an internal need to think about themselves and for themselves instead of imposing the teacher's point of view on students is the new task of this component of religious studies as a school subject [9].

An important feature of the content taught within subjects belonging to the domain of spirituality and ethics should be their focus on the development of positive attitude to mind-sets of other people with different religious beliefs. In a multiconfessional polyethnic environment that characterizes the Russian society, the freedom of conscience serves as one of the basic principles that support the general national accord, social and political stability and represent the institutional foundation of tolerance.

Adhering to the norms and principles of tolerance suggests an active and open communicative position in respect of their bearers. Therefore, tolerance refers not only to broad-minded attitude to manifestations of an authentic individual or group identity but is also characterized by its reflexive nature and justification of value priorities. The purpose of developing tolerance skills in the society (and in general education schools in particular) is the creation of a favourable atmosphere for supporting social solidarity and encouraging dialogue between participants of social interaction.

Summarizing the above, it should be noted that the religious and theological components of education differ in respect of their subjects, content, and social assignment; at the same time, both interact and contribute to the development of a spiritually rich and highly moral person. Studying the subjects within the domain of spirituality and ethics in general education institutions is the requirement of the modern time necessary for the development of social and individual tolerance - a socio-psychological quality that is essential for effective social interactions in a polycultural and multiconfessional environment.

3. World practice of implementation of religious education in general secondary schools

Russia does not have much experience of implementation of religious education in secular schools yet so the present time can be considered the time of introduction of religious education into secular schools. The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics is a school subject introduced into the school curriculum in 2010 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation as a federal component. Initially, it was introduced as an experimental initiative in 19 regions of Russia and starting from September 1, 2012 it became a compulsory course in all Russian regions.

The course includes six modules, one of which can be chosen by students: ‘The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture’, ‘The Fundamentals of Islamic Culture’, ‘The Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture’, ‘The Fundamentals of Jewish Culture’, ‘The Fundamentals of World Religious Cultures’, and ‘The Fundamentals of Secular Ethics’.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of Russian school students by their confessions as of 2018. Apparently, the developed theological course embraces all confessional, spiritual and atheistic preferences of students (or their parents, who can choose the module for their children).

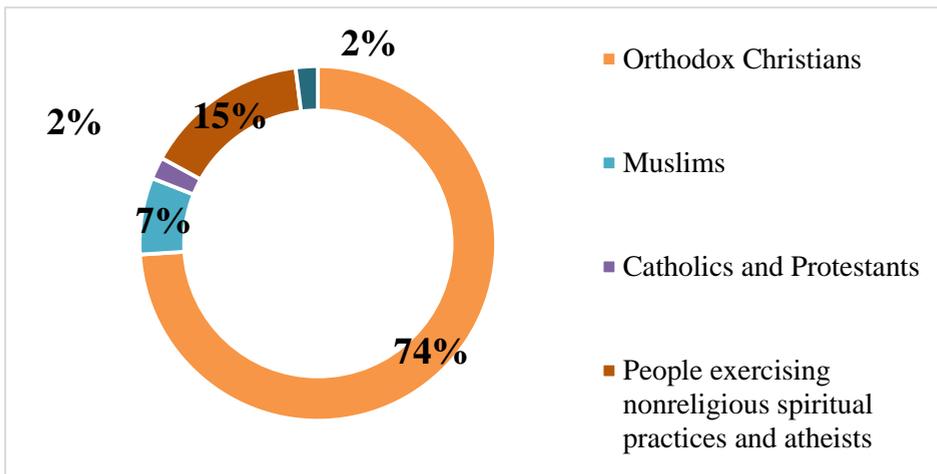


Figure 1. The breakdown of Russian school students by their confessions as of 2018 (Source: drawn up by the authors based on [3]).

However, there are several serious problems connected with the integration of religious education into secular schools in Russia. As for European countries, they already have experience in this sphere. In many of these countries, religion plays an important role in the school, and in some of them, it is an integral and compulsory part of the educational process. Meanwhile, even in confessional schools, religious education does not dictate its rules to secular studies. Therefore, it is reasonable to study the international

experience of organization and implementation of religious education.

In most countries nowadays, there is a trend towards secularization of education. Nevertheless, it happens not at the expense of exclusion of religion from the education system, but rather due to redistribution of responsibility for educational processes. In the modern context, the state that makes decisions about general issues related to secular and religious education and the role of religious organization in this sphere. The nature of problems connected with religious education faced and solved by different countries is not homogenous. In some countries, there are discussions about the possibility of providing state funding to religious schools, while in others, on the contrary, there are debates about the necessity and rationale for religious studies in state schools. Each country deals with these issues relying on its educational and religious policies and general ideological patterns.

There are many classifications of religious education. Let us review some of them and the ways of implementation of religious education in state educational institutions of different countries. The American researcher Donald Jarvis points out that at least three types of religious education can be distinguished: mentoring, religious studies, and moral upbringing [12].

As a rule, mentoring in certain religion takes place in countries where most of the population belong to this religion. Now it applies to European or Islamic countries, where most of the school students are Muslims or members of the Catholic/Orthodox church. In such countries, it is considered necessary to teach the fundamentals of the very religion that has played a significant role in the history of the country and evolution of the nation and thus represents the spiritual legacy of previous generations. It is thought that in this case teaching of one religion performs the consolidating function. However, there is a drawback that consists in the fact that studying a single religion leads to ethnocentrism: students learn about the 'official religion' and know hardly anything about confessions practiced by ethnic minorities.

In its turn, it leads to a lack of tolerance in interconfessional relations. Teaching one out of several religions causes almost the same problems and difficulties as the ones mentioned above. Considering separate European countries, such type of religious education is used in the following states: Austria, Germany (Catholicism or Protestantism), Spain (Catholicism, Islam or Judaism). Apart from the choice of religion to be studied, in these countries, there is an option to choose moral upbringing instead or refrain from religious education.

The third type of teaching religion is represented by religious studies or moral upbringing. Some countries (the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Sweden) offer students a course in religious studies. The course is taught by teachers working at general education schools, and the history of Christianity prevails in the content of the subject. In Japan and Taiwan students of general education schools have to study ethics, but, as a rule, teachers tend to include other aspects too. Religious studies as a school subject provide students with knowledge about the history of different religions, address philosophical and mind-set issues

concerning a human being, the world and the society, and help to develop a tolerant attitude to other religious communities.

However, the most common approach to religious education in state schools is its exclusion from the curriculum. Quite a lot of countries follow this path: Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, India, Mexico, the USA, the Czech Republic and others. Until recently Russia was also one of them. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that in these countries, there are Sunday schools and other opportunities for religious development and studying certain confessions [13-15].

Taking into account the fact that religious education embraces quite a wide range of social phenomena, the typology suggested by professor F. Kozyrev distinguishes the following types of religious education: professional religious education; general (school) religious education [16]. Professional religious education is aimed at training of religious workers for religious organizations. School religious education can be confessional or nonconfessional (secular) [8].

Confessional education is a catechetical form of teaching religion at school, which remains traditional and widespread in Europe, Latin America and Islamic countries. Nonconfessional forms of organization of school education evolved relatively recently (in the second part of the 20th century) and are used in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Scotland, England, Wales, Estonia, and Brazil. According to specialists, such forms have good potential because they allow developing a methodological and practical basis for religious pedagogics.

International experience shows that regardless of intellectual fashion and political crises, teaching the fundamentals of religion is an integral part of basic secondary education, and multiconfessional and polyethnic social environment cannot be an obstacle in this way. Many issues connected with the religious component of state education remain topical in modern Russia. Particularly, the aspects that require clarification include the following: combination of the constitutional guarantees of the freedom and conscience, on the one hand, and secular principles underlying secondary education, on the other hand; training of specialists in this field; and participation of representatives of various confessions in educational processes.

4. The European context of providing religious education within the system of multiconfessional education

We have examined different ways of interpretation and implementation of religious education within school systems. Let us consider several specific examples of European countries and try to identify the typical stages and characteristics of religious education.

First let us examine the situation in France, where the principle of separation of Church and state was formalized in law as early as in 1905. This relationship is called secularism.

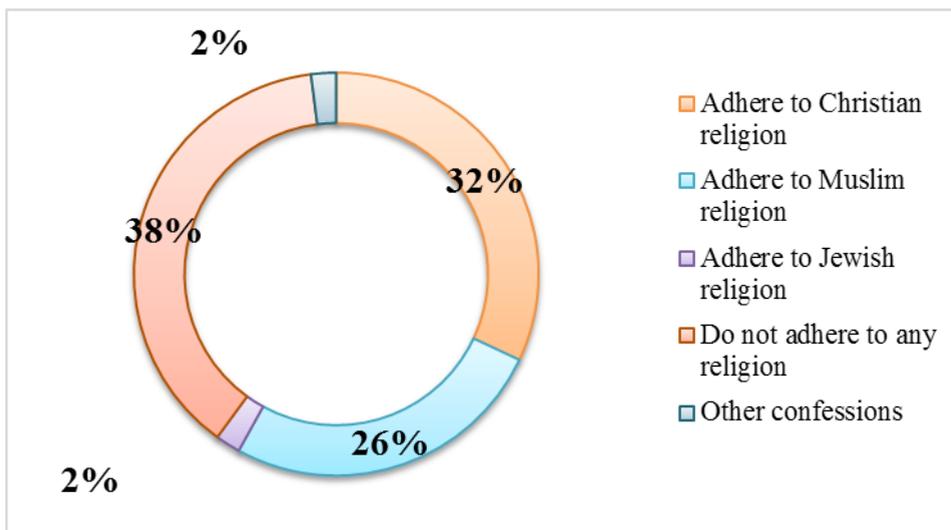


Figure 2. The breakdown of French school students by their confession as of 2018 (Source: drawn up by the author based on [13–15]).

The distinctive feature of France in this respect is a large number of private Catholic schools (about 20% of the total quantity of schools), which is quite natural for a country where the Catholic faith prevails (78.8%). However, by the end of the 20th century, the issue of religious identification of adolescents became particularly urgent. Therefore, in the middle of the 1980s, the religious studies component was introduced into the curriculum of general education. In 1989, the history and geography curricula were changed in order to cover the history of Christianity, and in 1996, studies of some aspects of Islam were introduced. This innovation has become especially important in the context of active immigration of Muslims from North Africa in the 1970-1980s. Apart from that, in 2002, an institute of religious studies was established in France for the training of specialists and development of religious education programs [8]. The breakdown of French school students by their confession as of 2018 is represented in Figure 2.

Thus, the traditional policy of secular antireligiousness, which developed in France due to historical reasons, evolved into a focus on secularity as freedom of conscience.

In Switzerland, these issues are addressed in a different way. The country consists of 26 cantons that are non-homogenous in terms of their ethnic and religious composition. In view of this, a special course ‘Religion and Culture’ has been developed, within which these phenomena are integral and interchangeable. The main purpose of this course is the build-up of competencies in the general aspects of religion and traditions. With that in mind, religious education as instruction is unacceptable in state schools but is totally supported in the form of theological works that focus on historically descriptive, socio-political, and worldview aspects.

Switzerland is recognized as a secular state, which means that each person chooses their own confession independently. One of the conducted surveys shows how tolerant are the Swiss to people with different religious views: 50% of Swiss school children consider themselves to be religious people. Students of Swiss schools treat the individual choice of confession with respect; the religion that is most actively discussed in the educational environment is Islam. Specific features of the Islamic religion are taken into consideration in the course of organization of studies. For school administration, it is important to get an understanding of the following things: how acceptable is it to wear a hijab at school? Is it necessary to set up a special room where Muslim students could pray? How should Muslim girls attend swimming classes in the swimming pool? At the same time, acceptance of the Islamic culture and religion allows to develop the feeling of respect towards different cultures and traditions in Swiss students [10].

In Great Britain, after World War II the religious component was legislatively introduced into general educational processes in order to develop national self-identification based on collective memory. It should be mentioned that at that stage the foundation of religious education was Christianity - the religion of most of the population. However, nowadays the multicultural approach dominates in the British system of general education.

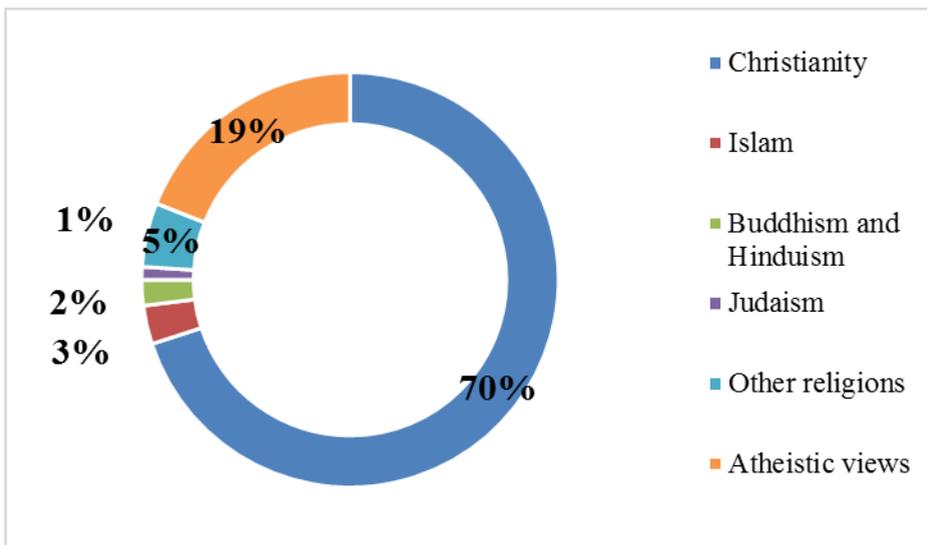


Figure 3. The breakdown of British school students by their confession (Source: drawn up by the author based on [13–15]).

The main changes were introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act, according to which the academic program must be developed since the British religious tradition is predominantly represented by Christianity. At the same time, studies and practice of other religious movements widespread in Great Britain must also be taken into consideration [7; 13; 15, p. 94]. This act shaped a

phenomenological approach to religious education: in fact, six religions are studied in the British education system. Apparently, British school students have access to learning about all aspects of religious studies that matter in the modern world. The breakdown of British school students by their confession is represented in Figure 3.

The subjects that cover religious studies in British schools are Theology and Philosophy. In some secondary schools, knowledge of these subjects is tested in an exam. During classes, students examine ethical issues in ways acceptable for children, study texts from the Bible, and learn about traditions and rituals. On the eve of holidays students put on plays devoted to religious topics. Children often go on sightseeing tours to spiritual places and attend meetings with representatives of different faiths.

In many European countries, religious education is compulsory, and Germany is no exception [7]. Religious training is an ancient tradition since first schools were established within the confines of a monastery. Religion develops tolerance in a person and reveals their best moral qualities. Religious education is guaranteed by the German Constitution. There are two main denominations in Germany: Catholicism and Protestantism. Until they turn 14, children study the type of religion chosen for them by their parents. Children who do not adhere to a particular religion attend more classes of Philosophy or Ethics.

Both school and Church contribute to the development of theological subjects. School looks for teachers, while church deals with the development of textbooks and study programs. The subject is studied from the first form all the way through to the last one. If there are five or fewer students in a school group, religious education can be taught outside of school premises, on the territory of religious communities. Strict requirements apply to teachers of religious studies in Germany: they have to possess higher theological education, i.e. graduate from a theological department or seminary. Besides, at pedagogical universities students can get the qualification of a religion teacher.

In Germany, it is commonly believed that religious education helps to become tolerant and reserved, improve the atmosphere of intercultural communication, develop mutual understanding and compassion. At primary school, children study canonical rules, Holy Scripture, how clergymen live, how life appeared on Earth according to the theological theory. Students examine moral principles using examples from biblical texts. At secondary school, teachers show how to use the fundamentals of faith in everyday life. Students consider the role of religion in relationships between people, nationalities, and families. At high school, religious education becomes more complex: students start studying the basics of Latin; on the eve of spiritual holidays they put on plays devoted to religious topics.

As we can see, in Western European countries religious (including theological) subjects are fully integrated into the system of general education. In Russia, optimal religious education that does not interfere with the secular principles of general education is only evolving. Therefore, the experience of countries that are the most advanced in this respect can become the basis for

reformation of the general education course ‘The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics’, which was introduced in Russian schools relatively recently.

5. Conclusions

To sum up this research, it should be pointed out that the theological aspect is important for the harmonious development of the process of teaching the younger generation at general education school. It is worth noting that within the Western European tradition, which preserves the principles of secularity and accessibility of school education, it is considered necessary to introduce theological subjects due to the following reasons:

- first, it allows to develop an essential social competency of tolerance in school students, which is very important in modern multicultural polyethnic societies;
- second, it allows students to get a better understanding of world history and the logic behind great geographical discoveries of the past as well as teaches them good neighbourly relations and fellowship;
- third, it develops the creative potential in students, unlocks their talents and abilities (through the staging of plays devoted to religious holidays).

The Russian practice of teaching religious subjects does not possess much experience since religious studies were introduced in schools relatively recently (within the period of 2010–2012). Therefore, the Western European experience can help to improve and integrate religious and theological subjects into the Russian general education system to the full extent. It is also important to take into consideration the essential Western European principles of teaching religious and theological subjects at general education schools:

- 1) high qualification requirements for teachers: these subjects can be taught both by clergymen and secular specialists, but in any case, they should have corresponding pedagogical training;
- 2) usage of multicultural phenomenological approach that provides equal accessibility of knowledge about six main world religions;
- 3) instructional programs on these subjects should include educational, historical, cultural, moral and creative components;
- 4) equal access to school religious education programs for all denominations. This is particularly important for the system of religious education that is being formed in Russia, since so far, there is a so-called spiritual confrontation between the Orthodox and other religious denominations.

In this way, modern religious education in Russia will encourage the solution of problems connected with low social tolerance towards other religions and eliminate the problem of cultural and religious antagonism against any social, political, etc. otherness.

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