

**DCCD 2020****Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****SOCIOCULTURAL INTERACTION OF SECULAR AND  
RELIGIOUS COMPONENTS IN MODERN RUSSIAN  
EDUCATION**

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***Abstract***

The article is devoted to the interaction of secular and religious education as a complex cultural process and the challenges to be regarded. Integration is overcoming differences in philosophical, historical, political and educational areas. From ontological angle secular and religious cultures are oriented at comprehending and reflecting fundamentally different sides of objective reality. Historically the time of USSR contributed to the cultural gap between of religion and secular education, thus, religious education was marginalized. Ideology change of the 1990s toward recognition of religion as an important part of social life followed the world trend towards desecularization marked by sociologists. This shift revived the dominant position of the Orthodox Church, which used to be the state church until 1917, in the inherited culture of the secular state. This led to specific state-church interrelations in Russia, where *de jure* Russia is viewed as a secular multi-confessional state, but *de facto* the educational policy is majorly organized according to the model of mono-religious country. To clarify the definition of religious education proves one of the key issues in socio-political discourse while focusing on religious education. Integration process is revealed in the multi-faceted adaptation of relatively independent secular and religious education subsystems in terms of their contribution to the effective functioning of the education system as a whole. The authors present an analysis of the research being conducted today by Russian scholars concerning the topical issues of secular and religious components of education and integration practices.

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**Keywords:** Secular, religious education, education, cultural integration.



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## 1. Introduction

The process of integration of secular and religious education started with the growing religious influence in the last decade of XX century. The introduction of the subject BRCSE (Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics) to the state schools curriculum was a compromise between the Orthodox Church lobbying the re-establishment of Religion catechesis in state schools and the secular character of state, determined by the Constitution. This initiative undermined the existing earlier social consensus where religion was limited to personal freedom of conscience and never influenced the basic social interests or group cultural preferences. The urge to smooth the rough edges of this decision has led to the creation of alternative courses on cultures of other religions, a strong opposition to clergy acquiring the possibility to have access to teaching the BRCSE, and the recruitment of new professionals or retraining of already recruited teaching staff. Academic circles have been witnessing the social innovations in education, aimed at maintaining stability and harmony in the society through interpenetration and consensus of cultural traditions.

## 2. Problem Statement

As religious education is institutionalized in the Russian society, the research is gaining momentum in the areas of pedagogy, cultural studies, philosophy and sociology. The process of implementing religious education in state educational institutions is tackled by L.A. Andreev, O.V. Bobrova, A. V. Kolodin, S.D. Lebedev, N.N. Reutov. One of the methodologically significant though controversial issues addressed in these studies is the question of defining the signal boundaries of the "religious education" concept

The concept of "religious education" was introduced by the Russian laws "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" and "On Education in the Russian Federation". However, Russian legislation fails to define this concept. As a result there is a number of interpretations of "religious education" among the scholars.

The clarification of definitions is one of the key targets for both secular and religious discourses (Miroshnikova, 2017). A systematic analysis of the provisions of the laws in question (Shahov, 2015) makes it possible to claim that religious education includes:

- religious instruction and religious education of children by parents or persons in loco parentis (paragraph 2 of Article 5 of the Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience...");
- religious instruction and religious education provided by the followers of a religious association (adults or children; members, participants of a religious association or persons intending to join it);
- religious instruction and religious education in educational institutions established by religious organizations;
- professional religious education of the would-be clergy and religious personnel in religious educational institutions.

Our country sees the formation of the domestic model of religious education in public schools which acquires a specific form of learning in accordance with the model of church-state interrelations. It is neither "confessional" which is typical of mono-religion states, nor "non-confessional" which is

characteristic of multi-confessional countries (Sirotkin, 2014). The example of the subject area of BRCSE being implemented claims the following: the confessional model is presented in four religious courses, and non-confessional model is presented in two courses (world religions and secular ethics). Another discrepancy is that *de jure* Russia is presented as a multi-confessional state, while *de facto* educational policies are introduced according to the model of a mono-religious country.

The suggested model of secular religious education relies on the new understanding on “secular” bearing no connotation of anti-religious. The change in the definition allowed to move confessional education (BRCSE and lately theology) to the field of cultural studies that suited the interests of the state, and thus was apparent as appropriate for secular state educational institutions. The new interpretation of “secular” was introduced by Ponkin (2003). Religious-cultural education curriculum was developed to be implemented in state and municipal educational institutions, and other institutions. Together with confessional religious education, it is provided on a voluntary basis according to international (Ferrari, 2015; “Organization for Security and ...”, 2007) and Russian legislation.

Another aspect of the mixed form of Russian education was theology introduced for undergraduates, graduates and later at the doctoral level. The State standard of education was following the pattern of religious – cultural education, however it took more time and effort to reach consensus with the academic community. The final achievement was marked with theology accepted as the area of academic studies in 2017. That was the logical result of religious component integrated into the system of education.

### 3. Research Questions

1) What are the common bases of secular and religious cultures? The philosophical problem of integration of secular and religious principles dates back to ontological basics of each phenomenon (Ferrari, 2015; Milbank, 2015). Canadian sociologist of religion Taylor (2011) traces the origin of the concept of secularity from the Latin Catholic tradition, when secularity was defined as the opposite to religious, it belonged to the profane and contradicted the eternal and sacred. Thus, etymologically secularity bears the original meaning of hostility towards the religious (Taylor, 2011). In this definition, "secularity" is inextricably connected with religiosity forming diadic relations, and, strictly speaking, cannot exist outside of these relations.

There is another widespread tradition of building a connection between secular and religious, where secularity is not opposed to the transcendent as a different worldview, but only indicates the narrowing of public outlook which implies the exclusion of the transcendent from the outlook without specifying the relations to it. This approach finds secular and religious divergent in philosophical terms - religious as the worldview answers the essential questions of human life, while secularity deliberately departs from them into the sphere of the earthly, finite, pragmatic (Sägesser et al., 2018)

A number of sociologists of religion (Bainbridge, 2017; Berger, 2014; Chesnokova & Belanovsky, 2018; Finke, 2016; Hjelm, 2018; Stark, 2015) dwell on the spreading desecularization with the growing influence of religions on the modern society. Scientists perceive this process as the reaction of society to the process of secularization, which lasted for quite a long time. Desecularization means the restoration of religious influence on the society as a whole, on all its spheres, including education. Researchers note that

these processes are not initiated by external influence, but by the immanent forces attributed to religiosity, according to Stark's theory, or to socio-cultural systems in general.

From the position of phenomenology the basics of both secular and religious types of culture were laid down by Sorokin (2018) in his fundamental work "Social and Cultural Dynamics". Analyzing the historical cycles of cultural changes on the macrosocial scale, Sorokin developed and substantiated the social and cognitive version of the main historical types of cultural systems based on the nature of cultural mentality (Sorokin, 2018). According to this theory, the principal difference between the main types of culture is based on the nature of priority reality, or, using Sorokin's (2018) term, "reality-values". He distinguished between an ideal-type culture, for which the nature of the true (priority) reality is super-sensitive, and a sensual-type culture, which is sensory. An ideal culture oriented to the supersensitive and supra-rational reality sees a mystical intuition as the main way of cognition. Accordingly, such culture does not manifest itself in the field of science and technology, because it focuses its cognitive energy on the study of eternal values and their implementation in life, shows creativity in religion. On the contrary, the culture oriented to the reality of the sensual or sensory plan finds the function of the main instrument of knowledge to be performed by empirical methods (observation, experiment). For this reason, sensual culture is manifested in scientific cognition of physical and biological properties of sensual reality. All this lays the grounds for correlating the ideal type of religious culture - with the ideal, while the ideal type of secular culture - with the sensual type of culture according to Sorokin's (2018) theory. We position the ideal-typical religious culture as a universal social-cognitive system "revolving" around supersensitive and supernatural realities and the associated values. On the contrary, we consider ideal-typical secular culture to be a universal system of social knowledge focused on earthly, mainly material, realities and corresponding sensual values that are of pragmatic, practical and instrumental character. The initial difference between religious and secular types of culture in terms of its socio-cognitive content, according to Sorokin's concept, is in their orientation to comprehend and reflect fundamentally different sides of objective reality. The key area of references forming the vital world of religious culture is super-sensual and super-rational being, comprehended by the means of mystical intuition, fixed in cult practices and theological constructions and reproduced in human consciousness and psychology through an act of faith. By contrast, the key area of reference that forms the essence of secular culture is the sensually and rationally comprehended material world. The consequence of this fundamental difference is, firstly, the essentially different content of the socio-cognitive arrays that form these cultures; secondly, the various dominant values and, thirdly, the various dominant ways of understanding (rationality).

From the position of sociology the interaction of secular and religious cultures is ultimately seen through the collision and mutual influence of the underlying structures of social knowledge (Lebedev, 2015). The essence of it lies in the fact that the nuclear structures of social cognitive systems of secular and religious types enter into an indirect interaction on the common periphery of their individual "worldly" meanings, comprehending both social everyday life and various specific aspects of social life. The key mechanism of this interaction is the struggle and coordination of cognitive structures produced by the system-forming ("nuclear") complex of cultural-counterparts for the development of peripheral spheres.

Therefore, the functional task of integration is expressed in mutual adaptation of relatively independent subsystems of secular and religious education in terms of their contribution to the effective functioning of the education system as a whole. The relationship between religious and secular culture, depending on many external and internal factors, is structured according to fundamentally different options. They can exclude one another, as well as naturally coincide, revealing a high degree of synthesis

What are the special features of integration of the religious and secular in Russian education system? The process of social and historical development shows that a mixture of ethnic, cultural and religious identities is characteristic to modern Russians. Throughout the centuries, religious education has been an obligatory element of the Russian national system of learning and education through the system of Orthodox Church elementary schools. At the beginning of XX century religious education fell under political ban in our country and the tradition of religious education has been interrupted, religious seminaries have been marginalized. That led to the stagnation of the religious education and its restoration after the fall of the Soviet Union starting almost from scratch. The mentality of Soviet people was made majorly religion-free with the remaining traditions to attend church on Easter Day or visit cemeteries.

Studies in the area of political science underline that the main problems of confessional-oriented education implementation lie in the specific features of the socio-cultural situation in modern Russia. Lebedev suggests focusing on the main institutionalized subjects of education in Russia such as Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate which acts as the leading initiator of changes; state structures responsible for the education; the society, including parents and children. Each of the subjects in particular has their interest in regard to education.

The Russian Orthodox Church as a religious organization is objectively interested in establishing and strengthening its authority. Educational communication is the channel that potentially contributes to the solution of relevant problems on a larger scale and in a long-term (strategic) historical perspective, a public (secular) school is a potentially influential missionary channel specializing in the contingent of children and adolescents and requiring minimal implementation costs.

The state, which experienced a deep crisis of legitimacy after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disavowal of Communist ideology, treated the ROC MP as a significant source contributing to its legitimization. With the rise of pro-religious and pro-Christian social attitudes, this led to the formation of a unity of state and church structures on the level of the center and regions. Therefore, state actors are interested in certain educational concessions to church structures while maintaining control over the main content and forms of education.

Finally, the position of the general public concerning the introduction of religious innovations into the public secular education system should be recognized as ambiguous. Nevertheless, the trend of public support for relevant church initiatives is quite positive. The effectiveness of interaction between the state, religious organizations, and the society in the issues of education will depend on a reasonable strategy of cooperation between the subjects of integration and the condition of the mechanism of this interaction, including multi-confessional representation of students in modern Russian school.

What features of Russian educational system are influencing integration? The special features of the Russian education itself are important as they present the set in which abovementioned integration is

taking place (Reutov, 2009; Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2017). The study of education from sociological perspective reveals several contradictions inherent to modern education between:

- the requirements to the level of knowledge of students and the real state of this knowledge; between the stated goal of harmonious development of a personality and the content of education;
- the declared goal of personal development and the actual practice of educating according to a given model;
- modern requirements to material and technical equipment and the reduced funding of education;
- the social significance of education and the reality teachers face. The number of controversies led to the formalization of the educational endeavors, including integration of religious education.

The course of integration sees problems of various nature, which are determined by the worldview, normative-legal, organizational-pedagogical, socio-cultural and social-identification grounds of secular and religious education integration. The improvement of these conditions contributes to the fact that socio-cultural foundations become positive determinants of the secular and religious education integration.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Purpose of the study is further development of the paradigmatic bases of secular and religious education integration, expressed in clarifying the definitions of the key terms suggested, determining the historical and cultural processes involved in integration, finding the political groundwork to the process expressed in the state-church relations, studying the inherent features of secular education and methods used to integrate into the civil society in search of optimal strategy and tactics of implementing a new direction in the educational sphere.

#### **5. Research Methods**

It is the object of study and reflection of scientists belonging to different spheres of scientific knowledge: social philosophers, sociologists, cultural scientists and teachers. The interdisciplinary nature of the study allows a deep and comprehensive review of socio-cultural conditions of interaction between the secular and religious components in Russian education, revealing its features, nature and forms. The study of the problem employed the methods of systematic analysis of philosophical, sociological and pedagogical literature on the problem, the method of addressing the academic discourse on the problem, which allows to supplement the materials of source analysis with initial provisions on the socio-cultural features of interaction between secular and religious components of Russian education, the boundaries of this interaction, its integrative nature.

#### **6. Findings**

There is a conceptual difference in the secular and religious cultures, according to the cultural mentality. The phenomena of the secular and religious in education, depending on many external and internal factors, can be structured according to fundamentally different options. They can exclude one another, as well as coincide, revealing a high degree of synthesis.

Special features of integration of the religious and secular in Russian education include historical development of religious education as a part of national education in the mono-confessional Russian state and the period of its marginalization during the Soviet time. The new period of its re-institution in Russia after the 1990s is characterized by the lack of social consensus in regard to the political decisions on integrating the religious education into the secular system

Integration process goes along with the development of state-church relations and follows the pattern of mono-confessional state in spite of the multinational and multi-confessional character declared in the Constitution. Religious-cultural approach to religious education in state institutions is a compromise between social interests of the church and the state. The inherited controversies within the Russian educational system between the stated goal, expectations, resources and practice resulted in the formalization of the educational endeavors, including integration of religious education.

## 7. Conclusion

Historical and socio-political conditions and ideological prerequisites that have emerged in modern Russia have had a strong impact on the state of relations between the state and religious organizations, involved in the process of education. With the two models of education existing: secular and religious, aimed at reaching different goals and using different approaches, the integration of secular and religious knowledge should be implemented on the basis of a reasonable compromise relying on common values. The development of secular and religious education integration is seen as a condition for the development of an educational system that will acquire a new quality and a new potential.

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