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## Teaching “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in Schools of the Tambov Region: Achievements and Problems

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*This paper analyzes the conceptual bases for introducing and implementing the course “Foundations of World Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” in public schools of the Tambov region. It draws upon official data presented by the diocesan administration and the regional department of education. The article also presents the results of independent monitoring of the introduction and teaching of “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in the Tambov regional schools that was carried out by the staff of the Center for Religious Studies of Tambov State University. This monitoring included questionnaires, attendance at parents’ meetings, and conversations with teachers who were trained in the subject matter and who had experience teaching it. The author analyzes different opinions about teaching “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” in schools; identifies the most significant problems in this area, which include the preparation of teachers and the low motivation of teachers and students; and gives examples of positive experiences.*

**Keywords:** Foundations of Orthodox Culture, knowledge about religion in school, the problem of teacher training, parental opinion.

THE question of what to teach about religion in school remains acute in Russian society. According to surveys in 2009 (that is, when the subject of religion began to be taught in Russian schools) a significant number of respondents to the question, “Should there be a subject in school dealing with knowledge about religion?” answered in the affirmative (“Vybyli” 2017).

In 2011, Patriarch Kirill voiced his opinion: “The introduction [of the course] ‘The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture’ is one of the most important issues on the agenda of church-state relations, one that to a significant degree has decisive importance for the fate our national education and one that directly affects the interests of millions of parents and their children” (Kirill 2011).

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) often speak about the spiritual and moral crisis that Russian society is experiencing and view teaching “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” (OPK — *Osnovy pravoslavnoi kul'tury*) in school as a means of overcoming it. Thus, for example, the director of the Orthodox St. Peter Gymnasium in Moscow, Father Andrei Posternak, recently said:

“The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” concerns how a young person makes a moral choice and learns to distinguish between good and evil in the modern world, in which, unfortunately, moral criteria have long ceased to define social life. And history shows that only religion can establish moral criteria in society and the state. (Matsan and Posternak 2012)

Critics of Russian education point to the fact that it is constantly being reformed, and that the pedagogical component has been eliminated from the educational process, which has turned it into a system for producing professional competencies.

The objectives outlined in the proposal by representatives of the ROC titled “The Concept of Including the Subject ‘Orthodox Culture’ in the New Generation of State Standards for a Common Middle School Education as Part of the New Planned Educational Curriculum ‘Spiritual and Moral Culture,’” have not themselves elicited objections. These objectives include:

1. the development of children’s [moral] upbringing within the system of state and municipal education; the expansion of opportunities for the development of children’s spiritual culture and morality — which society recognizes as one of the main requirements for overcoming negative social tendencies and processes — in general educational institutions;
2. fulfilling the educational needs of citizens who represent various worldviews, including those of religious and confessional groups in the Russian Federation, and of their children in the state and municipal education system, in general educational institutions;

3. regulating the practice of studying the religious culture of various confessions in general education institutions, as well as [offering] other ideological, ethical, philosophical and religious courses developed on the basis of non-religious worldviews and approaches. (“Konseptsiiia” 2007)

However, the public reaction to the introduction of the subject of religion in schools has been mixed. Some think that any division of children in school based on religion could be explosive in current Russian conditions; others say that this system will provide an opportunity for children to study their culture and religion. There is no unanimity in the ROC itself. But all agree that there are not enough personnel who have the knowledge necessary for the introduction of this subject in school. Only those who favor the so-called “ideological-formal” approach are optimistic: “All members of the Council [the Board of Trustees of the Central Federal District for implementing the project ‘The Revival of the Religious and Moral Heritage’] agreed that religious and moral upbringing is the ideological basis of the state” (“Dukhovno-nravstvennoe vospitanie” 2010, 27). According to adherents of this position, excessive knowledge is even harmful for teaching OPK; it is enough to have taken a course on Holy Scripture.

In the Tambov region, this project is being implemented in accordance with “The Concept of Including the Subject ‘Orthodox Culture’ in the New Generation of State Standards for Secondary Education.” The process of introducing the subject area “The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”(ORKSE) is controlled by the diocesan administration and supervised by the head of its Department of Religious Education and Catechization, someone who has a higher degree, although in military-technical education, and who is a definite supporter of the abovementioned “ideological-formal” approach. The legitimate question arises as to how competent he is in matters of implementing educational programs and in examination of subjects that require knowledge in humanities disciplines, in ethics, pedagogy, and didactics. To this question the responsible person at the regional Department of Education and Science answered: “It is precisely representatives of the diocese who are the most competent in this area.” In order to work more efficiently the diocese and the Department of Education have created a joint working group to evaluate the comprehensive ORKSE educational program (Feodosii 2010, 20). Neither representatives of the public, parents, nor high school teachers are taking part in discussing and implementing this initiative, and the staff of the Department of Education and Science only consult with the diocesan

administration, even on the issue of defining an alternate course for people who choose the subject “Secular Ethics.” It turns out that this violates a clause of the “The Concept”:

Employees of research centers and university professors are engaged in the preparation and examination of indicative educational standards in the relevant academic subjects and model training programs. (“Kontseptsiiia” 2007)

The “Concept” indicates that teaching this course is controlled by the corresponding religious organization, including control over its content and staff. The law “On Education” states:

Model core educational programs in school subjects, courses, and disciplines (modules) aimed at providing students with knowledge about the basics of the religious and moral culture of the peoples of the Russian Federation, about ethical principles, and about the historical and cultural traditions of world religion (or religions), pass through review by the centralized religious organization corresponding to the [particular] belief system to see that they comply with the doctrine, historical and cultural traditions of the organization, in accordance with its internal statutes. (“Federal’nyi zakon” 2018)

However, the above documents do not state specifically how to select personnel for teaching subjects concerning religion. At one time we heard from the lips of the president of the Russian Federation and the minister of education that secular experts in the field of religious culture and ethics would come to school to teach subjects in the framework of the ORKSE program (“Medvedev predlozhit” 2009). To our question about who will present this subject in the schools of the Tambov region, the head of the diocesan Department of Religious Education, Archpriest Igor Grudanov, gave the direct response that representatives of the diocese will decide who will be allowed to implement the program. As the main selection criterion he named the “churchliness” of the teacher, without specifying what this means. Russian researchers in the sphere of the study of religion argue about the meaning of this term, introduced into scholarly use by V.F. Chesnokova (Chesnokova 2000; 2005). In scholarly studies that use this concept they try to define the criteria for “measuring churchliness,” among which most often appear such things as the frequency of attending services, taking confession, communion, and observing fasts. Most

likely, in the given case this means that the teacher should have experience of church life. But the procedural question remains: how to control the assessment of such experience? This would only be possible if they introduced control over ideological and religious life, which is contrary to the Constitution. Or is it enough to express your loyalty to certain ideals in words?

In short, it is impossible to exercise this kind of control, just as it is impossible to find the required number of “churched” teachers. Teachers reveal all the features of a generalized portrait of a modern Russian, in particular — a discrepancy between their declared religiosity and the extent of their religious practice. Thus, according to a survey conducted in the city of Tambov and the region by the Center for Religious Studies of Tambov State University, 87.9% percent of respondents called themselves Orthodox; at the same time, 81.5 percent called themselves believers but only 42 percent called themselves believers *with confidence*, whereas 39.5 percent preferred to choose the option “I am somewhat believing.” Only 8 percent of respondents said that they regularly participate in the life of the church or community and attend services; the majority, more than 60 percent, attend services on major holidays (Christmas, Easter) or in connection with events such as baptism, marriage, funeral services, the arrival of icons, relics, or other sacred objects.<sup>1</sup> At the present time, lessons on “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture” (OPK) in schools of the region are taught by primary school teachers or teachers of specific subjects (most often by teachers of world culture and literature). My conversations with teachers have shown that for the most part they have neither the necessary knowledge nor the motivation to teach such a course. Some openly stated that they are atheists, but that this course was assigned to them, and that they find it difficult to imagine how they will teach it. All of our interlocutors without exception noted that the ten-day advanced training courses that are offered cannot fully prepare a person to teach OPK. The instructor needs to have knowledge of the history of Christianity and Orthodoxy, the content of Orthodox dogma and moral doctrine, of church rites and traditions, Christian art, and so on, that is impossible to master in ten

1. The main goal of this research is to study the influence of religion on the belief system, behavioral motivation, and social practices of modern Russians, based on analysis of the residents of the city of Tambov and the Tambov region. Its method is using questionnaires based on established practices. Its duration: February 2013–March 2014. Those surveyed consisted of the general population of Tambov and the Tambov region. The sample set was determined by 3200 respondents living in the Tambov region. The data was processed using the software package Portable IBM SPSS Statistics v19.

days. Furthermore, some of the teachers who had passed the retraining course reported that they were not supplied with the educational materials necessary for teaching but, on the contrary, they were required to bring their own materials, works-ups and presentations for lessons, to be gathered into a common resource bank. In turn, one of the course's instructors admitted in conversation that they only give lectures on Orthodox culture, since the Institute for Advanced Training did not engage, and did not plan to attract, instructors with a broader background, scholars of religion or philosophy (to teach lessons on ethics). At the same time, in 2014, that is, four years after the start of the experiment, Feodosii, bishop of the Tambov and Rasskazovsky regions, in one of his speeches, spoke of OPK teachers' lack of systematic knowledge of the faith and of Christian traditions due to the fact that they had not received an Orthodox upbringing in their families, and he noted that some of the teachers of OPK were spiritually and psychologically unprepared to teach the course (Feodosii 2014).

The position of church representatives is somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, they confidently assert that its adherents, first of all, the clergy, can adequately discuss the Orthodox faith and tradition: "Who can tell about the spiritual and moral traditions of our people better than clergymen?" (quoted from a speech by the head of socio-cultural center "Transformation" at a meeting of an association of OPK teachers ["Zasedanie metodicheskogo ob"edineniia" 2011, 18]). On the other hand, priests are not being invited to school to teach about religion on a voluntary basis. Possibly this is due to the laboriousness of such teaching. Another reason may be that church leaders are beginning to see Orthodoxy as a factor in creating state ideology and forming civic identity, and for this reason they are not against the large-scale, formalized teaching about Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition. Therefore, random people with little knowledge about the subject and even far from the faith may teach it.

A proposal that the regional university invite trained religious scholars to teach was rejected. This rejection reflected the negative view of religious studies itself on the part of the head of the diocesan Department of Religious Education: "Religious studies tries to put itself above religions; this is a harmful discipline and it should not have a place in the Russian educational system." It appears that this opinion has acquired the status of a "party" position and has been imposed on the bureaucrats of the regional Department of Education, which was not slow to be revealed. Thus, in response to the proposal to involve religious scholars both as teachers and as specialists, a rep-

representative of the Office of Education suggested that the real specialists in religion are the priests of the diocesan administration, and that therefore one should be guided in one's work primarily by the words of the patriarch. For the record, yet another point stated in the "Concept of Including the Subject 'Orthodox Culture'" is not being followed: that

the implementation of all actions and undertakings based on the provisions of this Concept should be open and public on all levels, with the broad participation of the pedagogical and parental community and under the control of institutions of civil society. ("Kontsepsiia" 2007)

Another important circumstance is the church's active use of administrative resources in this area. In an interview with the TV channel Soiuz a ruling bishop noted:

We work together [with secular authorities] not only in terms of the revival of shrines. I would say that in the Tambov region a lot is being done in the way of educating young people. We have very good relations here with our regional Department of Education, with school administration, with teachers, and the community of parents. (Feodosii 2016)

The results of this interaction are very significant: in the Tambov region today, 96 percent of parents have chosen to have their children taught "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture." To a journalist who expressed misgivings about this overly high percentage, the bishop replied without a shadow of hesitation that there was a lot of work behind it. Besides, he confidently expressed the opinion that this is the way it should be, since parents truly realize the importance of inculcating their children with the values that Christianity preaches. "These are really good results that have only been achieved due to the fact that we have good and mutually beneficial cooperation [with parents]; . . . in this area there is an understanding that today we must think about and care for young people and, of course, to bring them up on high evangelical moral values" (Feodosii 2016).

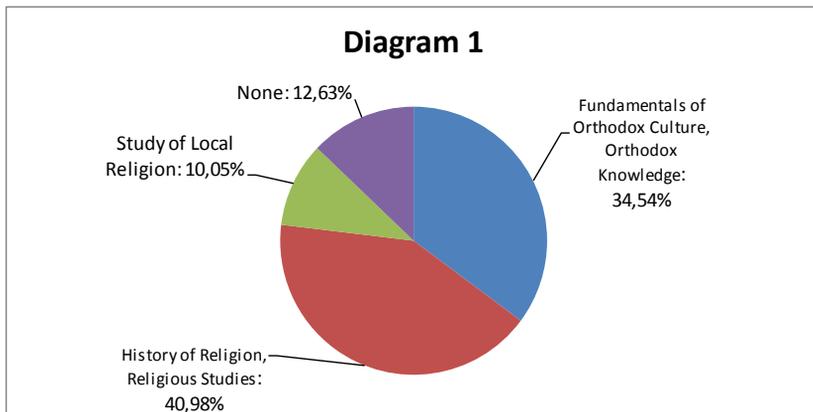
However, in 2010, at the beginning of the initiative, which included the Tambov region along with nineteen other areas of the Russian Federation, a commission consisting of representatives of the diocese, an institute for advanced training, and teachers noted that there had been difficulties in implementing it. Among the main problems they named low motivation among teachers and the difficulty of the subject matter for primary teachers, because teaching the course demands

significant erudition on their part. Initial monitoring of parents' attitudes toward the chosen modules that was carried out in 2009 showed that 55 percent of parents chose OPK, 37 percent — secular ethics, and 7 percent — “Fundamentals of World Religious Cultures” (Feodosii 2010, 19). The Commission considered this result unacceptable and decided to do another survey after having worked with parents, head teachers, and teachers. The necessity now arose of carrying out the second survey *under the control of [the diocesan] Office of Education*. According to the results of the second survey, 92 percent of parents now chose OPK, from which one can conclude that the measures taken were successful.

In parallel, independent researchers at the Center for Religious Studies monitored the implementation and experience of teaching the OPK course in city and regional schools from 2012 to 2017. This included a whole range of activities: questionnaires; presence at parents' meetings at which the course was discussed, conversations with teachers who were to teach this subject, and with those who already had experience teaching similar material.

In 2013, to the question, “Which subject should be taught in school?,” of the proposed options 34.54 percent of the polled residents of the Tambov region chose “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” and “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Knowledge”; 40.98 percent chose “The History of Religions” and “Religious Studies”; 10 percent selected “The Study of Local Religion”; and 12.63 percent answered none of the above (diagram 1).

*Diagram 1. The answers given by residents of the Tambov region to the question, “Which subject should be taught in school?,” in percentages.*



Considering the results of the pilot survey that was conducted a year before the main stage of polling, one can say that the responses did not change significantly, but that the number of those who replied that such a subject should not be taught in school rose from 8 percent to 12 percent. True, the 2017 survey was only carried out in one school, although it was precisely among those parents who had to choose a module, and not among all inhabitants of the region, as in the previous polls. It showed that 16 percent thought that religious education was unnecessary, and that 32 percent were in favor of religious education, but only in the family.<sup>2</sup> This is evidence of the increasing tension in discussion of the issue; some saw an opportunity to escape from its complexities and conflicts by rejecting the introduction of this kind of subject into schools altogether.

Introducing the subject into school presupposed that parents would choose one of the proposed modules at a parent's meeting. Meetings attended by researchers who were parents of students, about whom word had been spread by other parents, usually proceeded as follows. The fourth grade homeroom teacher reports that in the last quarter of this class and in the first quarter of the fifth grade students will be taught about religion. When parents ask, "Why is this needed?," as a rule, they get the answer: "Our children need to know about their traditions, including religious ones." The question, "Is it possible to skip this subject?" receives a negative response because this subject is required for everyone. This testifies to the fact that gradually during the implementation of this initiative they dropped the previously announced principle that taking this course would be voluntary. Next, the teacher informs parents about the fact that there are several modules to choose from, but then concludes that everyone must choose "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture." To the questions, "Why?" and, "Is it possible to take a different module?" the answers are given that "OPK is the study of our traditional culture," and "in any case there is no one to teach the other modules since the advanced training courses are only about OPK." Insofar as parents repeatedly received the very same arguments in favor of OPK, one may conclude that at the advanced training courses teachers were given instructions on how to respond if parents asked for other modules. A number of other facts confirms this. Thus, we learned from an instructor of the advanced training course who would be teaching this subject that she only taught a short course about the basics of Orthodox culture, and that, as she frankly admitted, she was incompetent to speak about

2. Survey of parents of a school in Tambov, February 2017. Sample: forty-four parents.

other religious cultures. In turn, the head of the Department of Religious Education and Catechization of Tambov diocese, Archpriest Igor Grudanov, speaking to teachers at a regional conference, recommended that parents be told that the course on “Secular Ethics” is atheistic, and that no one wanted to write a textbook for it because of the incongruous subject matter and because Russian culture is so inextricably linked with Orthodoxy. Such arguments, of course, influenced parents’ choice.

At the same time, it should be noted that representatives of the church often represent the situation in the exact opposite way. This happens when a parent’s choice leans toward the subject of “Secular Ethics”:

Parents are poorly informed about their right to choose a desired module from the integrated program “The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (ORKSE). Most parents do not know about the purpose and objectives of the course “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” (OPK). “The Fundamentals of Secular Ethics” is strongly recommended to them, [or] if worse comes to worst, the so-called “Foundations of World Religions.” So more often than not there is a situation that one can characterize as “choice without a choice.” (Pivovarov 2012)

What are the specific results of the introduction of “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” into Tambov schools, that is, what do we see in practice? The results have been quite predictable: in class, teachers went over material from textbooks with the students, but lacking serious knowledge of Orthodoxy, they presented their own, sometimes quite peculiar, ideas about Orthodox culture. Sometimes the children came away with quite a distorted understanding of this subject. Here are some examples of the curiosities that were revealed when speaking with students after taking this course. One student “learned” that the Trinity is three gods; another said that the Holy Spirit is when a priest waves an censer. It is not very clear why teachers need to touch upon some of the most complex questions of Christian dogma in a class for children ten to eleven years old, but in any case, it is obvious that their knowledge about the fundamentals of Orthodox teaching is insufficient.

Most often, we had to record the students’ lack of knowledge of the subject. For example, in answer to my question, the children could not name the major Orthodox holidays, nor could they say which biblical event is associated with the Easter holiday. Only after a clue about painted eggs were most of the children able to name the holiday asso-

ciated with this custom. (We should note that at the time of the conversation no more than a month had passed since Easter Sunday, and that the course was taking place in the same half-year.) Conversations with ninth-grade children showed that most often they remember almost nothing about this course. Some recalled lessons that covered topics that touched them personally, for example, about heroes, about friendship. Almost no one mentioned a properly religious topic.

It is also interesting to cite parents' opinions recorded after their children had taken OPK, which are reflected in the following table:

*Table 1. Evaluation of the OPK course by parents. Answers to the question: "What is the value of the OPK course for children?"*

Acquisition of new knowledge about traditions and culture	40%
Moral education of the child	24%
Gives religious education	8%
Other opinions, no answer	24%
A total of 44 parents were questioned.	

Thus, most parents perceived the course as culturological, acquainting students with Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition; parents also noted topics relating to moral concepts: friendship, honesty, kindness, mercy, and so on, but only a few of them (8%) perceived elements of religious education in it.

As an example of the ambiguous interaction of the church leadership with the authorities in the field of education on the regional level, we may cite the case of the renovation of a building for the Tambov Theological Seminary from which a public school was evicted via administrative measures. In the already cited interview of 2016 on the TV channel Soiuz, Bishop Feodosii of the Tambov and Rasskazovsky regions said:

Today the Seminary, as I said, is growing; it is located in a large, spacious building of the Diocesan House [*arkhireiskii dom*], but very recently we received another building for the seminary on the territory of the monastery, where one of the city of Tambov's secondary schools was located. Now the school has been removed from the territory of the monastery and we are making this structure into the seminary's second building, reconstructing it in accordance with the requirements of Rosobrnadzor [the federal agency for supervision of education and science] and according to the wishes and requirements of our Education Committee. As a

result there will be everything necessary for the proper housing and education of our seminarians: an excellent refectory, an assembly hall that I hope will seat 200, and lecture halls. (Feodosii 2016)

Obviously, the bishop is confident about the correctness of his position and that evicting school children and teachers from the building did not bother him at all. In personal conversation, former students of this school expressed indignation about this action, which for many of them generated a negative attitude toward the church as a whole.

Patriarch Kirill believes that everyone recognizes that the experiment of introducing ORKSE into schools has been successful. It is possible that he bases his conclusion on the official reports of regional educational authorities. We happened to attend a meeting at the Tambov regional administration of its working group on the harmonization of interethnic relations at which a report [was presented] on the results of the region's participation in the project to introduce the ORKSE (more accurately, the ORK) curriculum into all schools. Formally, everything looked positive and effective. But substantive analysis of the report's data raised a mass of questions. The first concerned the performance indicators it used. For example, after two years of the experiment (i.e., teaching this course in the fourth grade), how can one draw the conclusion that the level of drug addiction dropped by 24 percent? It also seems untenable to conclude that family relations improved by 70 percent over this period; this and other similar indicators simply cannot be confirmed empirically.

Another important area to consider is [the program's effect on] higher education. At the initiative of the diocese, the regional university opened a program in theology. The nature of such organizational activities testifies to the fact that they are undertaken for political purposes. "Today, of course, we are trying very hard to accomplish the tasks that His Holiness the Patriarch sets us," said Bishop Feodosii in his interview. But this is an ideological task, since in this paradigm religion is seen as a new form of civil and national ideology. So most often the discourse concerns such goals as strengthening the nation and the state, traditional values, the revival of spirituality, and about creating a system to protect religion.

Our observations and analysis do not support the conclusion that religious education in the form in which it is currently being introduced into the Russian educational system will promote the goals of moral upbringing or harmonizing ethnic and interfaith relations. Teaching ORK at school does not give students even a minimal knowledge of the religious traditions being studied.

As for the implementation of the program on theology at the regional university, one cannot expect positive results by virtue of the “formal-party” approach to this initiative. First of all, the region does not have the personnel necessary for teaching the disciplines appropriate in a theological curriculum. Among its teaching staff the local seminary has two BA’s in history who have basic knowledge of history but not a single teacher with a theological degree, so it cannot be of help in this case. The level of training of seminarians is quite low, and learning is reduced to mastering the liturgical calendar, which is necessary first of all for future or already serving clergy. True, the bishop has collected an excellent theological library in the seminary, but without teachers with the necessary professional qualifications, this cannot solve the problem.

The situation is even more complicated concerning the teaching of disciplines connected with the study of religion in the theology program. The appointment of relevant teachers was carried out by the head of the Diocesan Department of Education in coordination with the bishop; the university was completely sidelined from the process. Therefore, it is not surprising, for example, that teaching the discipline “New Religions” was assigned to a clergyman with no academic degree or pedagogical experience. At the same time, the university does have a specialist in this field, active in the religious studies program, with a PhD in the philosophy of religion and religious studies. Why did they exclude this expert? As it was explained to us, it was because of his “unreliable” worldview, the fact that this expert allowed himself to criticize church activities in his writing. Something similar happened in connection with a course on law regarding religion. The university has an appropriate specialist who is a member of various commissions on relations with religious organizations and who is chairman of the regional council for conducting religious studies examinations, but the course was taken over by the head of the diocese’s General Department of Religious Education, who only has a basic technical education. Here we see the completely unjustified selection of teachers for the program based on ideological considerations, provoking conflict among university professors and teaching staff, and not making use of existing scholarly and pedagogical resources. No one is concerned here about the subject matter to be taught or the pedagogical and methodological approaches to be taken. A natural result of the fact that incompetent people are developing the program in theology at the university was that they appointed someone far from religion as its head, although the program was created primarily to prepare teachers to teach ORK in the region’s schools.

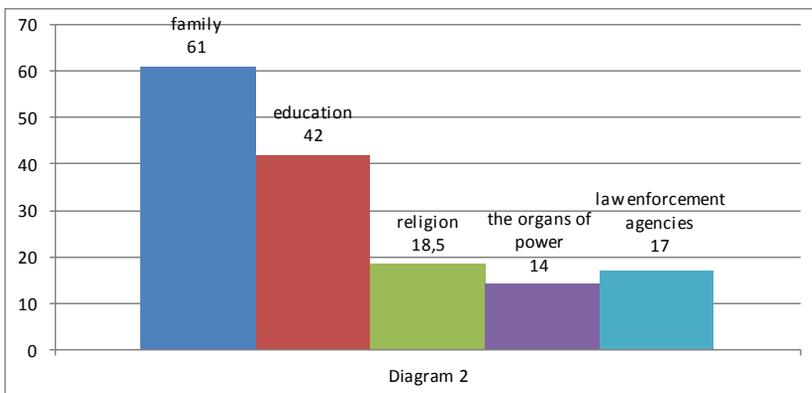
At the same time, it is already possible to say that in the student milieu a negative attitude toward the Russian Orthodox Church has acquired features of a lasting trend. In the 1990s, several researchers determined that a “pro-Orthodox consensus” was forming in Russian society: Orthodox and believers of other religions as well as unbelievers expressed a positive attitude toward the ROC. At that time negative responses were only expressed by individuals; today in lecture halls we are observing a change. The number of young people identifying themselves as atheists has increased. Ten or even five years ago very few called themselves this; such a choice of worldview was extremely unpopular and aroused indignation or bewilderment in most people. But the situation has changed, and more and more young people consciously call themselves not indifferent to religion, but precisely atheists. It is interesting that during conversations with such young people we most often find out that they do allow for the existence of some kind of transcendental force, but they categorically reject religion and religious institutions. Moreover, one can find a similar outlook among many of those who identify themselves as Orthodox. To questions about the reasons for this attitude, young people give roughly the same answers: scandals associated with expensive items and cars belonging to clergy; immoral actions committed by them; the church’s property claims, seizure of buildings and land; the church’s lack of meaningful participation in solving social issues. According to the results of research trips in the region, our team members noted that conversations about religion began to cause people irritation and disgust. It appears that the church is rapidly losing the credit with people that it had in the 1990s and 2000s.

At the same time, the region has had positive experiences teaching subjects related to the study of religious traditions in its schools. For example, in the school in the village of Kuzmina Gat, where the teachers themselves developed a training kit for ORKSE, they constantly participate together with students in various competitions and projects, carry out research on the history of the local cathedral, and write biographies of churchmen.

The gymnasium named for St. Pitirim of Tambov exhibits its success with pride. True, in this case it is only possible to objectively judge the part of the primary school that has taught ORK once a week for over five years, and where they developed a system of supplementary education including such subjects as religious singing and folk art; extracurricular activities are focused on religious holidays and other events. One should also note that in this case the children and parents are aware of this institution’s program and are therefore motivated to study religious traditions from the start.

Gymnasium teachers have many years of experience teaching subjects that correspond to OPK using interesting contemporary methods. For example, there is S. I. Belan's project of creating an interactive map with school children titled "Tambov's Holy Treasures Yesterday and Today," and O.M. Eroshkina's project, "A Virtual Museum as a Means of Forming a Unified Informational Environment in the Sphere of Religious and Moral Education." There is also the example of A.V. Seregina, an experienced scholar of methodology in the field of teaching about religion in school. We have attended her classes and workshops more than once. She is the author of numerous educational materials that have received recognition at the federal level. The main principle of her method is to avoid moralizing and to tell children about Christianity through its connections with art, literature, and ethics. Seregina takes into account the actual state of contemporary Russians' religiosity, and therefore, in our opinion, is able to achieve positive results. The special nature of the process of restoring religious tradition in modern society does not require the introduction of culture through religion, but, on the contrary, the introduction of religion via culture – through customs and traditions existing at the family or community level, through art, philosophy, and ethics. To confirm this, we can cite the results of a survey of residents of the Tambov region asking them which forces can best strengthen moral values in our society today (diagram 2).

*Diagram 2. Answers of inhabitants of the Tambov region to the question: "What forces today can best strengthen moral values in our society?"<sup>3</sup>*



3. Survey of inhabitants of the Tambov region. Sample size: 1200.

We see that, with a large margin, residents name the family and have high hopes for education, while religion (by a factor of 2 to 3 times less) occupies third place rather than first (as, perhaps, supporters of the “formal-ideological” approach to introducing ORK into schools might expect).

We may draw some conclusions based on our observations. First of all, children form deep conceptions about religious culture only as a result of a systematic approach, when interdisciplinary connections are established, when knowledge, learned in the classroom, is buttressed by additional activities and receives creative application (as in the process of preparing for such things as performances, concerts, and school projects). In our opinion, a positive outcome from teaching about religion in schools is possible, but only within the framework of specialized Orthodox schools to which children come ready for such study and where it is possible to gather a team of enthusiastic teachers. If we try to talk about traditions, cultural norms and values through religion (whose influence was interrupted during the Soviet period) we find that society is not receptive. As a result, we do not obtain an understanding of religious culture, but rather flawed knowledge about tradition and the debasing of religious feeling.

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