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Postsoviet Moral Education in Russia's State Schools: God, Country and Controversy

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With the demise of communism, Russia's state school administrators and teachers found themselves facing a new challenge. They needed to find new sources of moral education to sustain their country within a public education system now attempting to accept and respect ideological pluralism. This essay chronicles and critically examines official Russian Ministry of Education attempts to accomplish this difficult endeavour. In particular, it seeks to chart the pragmatic nature of the ministry's efforts that have ultimately led it back to distinctively Russian forms of moral education.

The first section of the essay briefly reviews the importance and nature of communist moral education and the effects of its abolition. It also recounts initial attempts by the Russian Ministry of Education in the early to mid-1990s to replace communist moral education with a pluralistic system of voluntary, supplementary moral education programmes that opened state schools to foreign religious influences. These attempts largely ended in failure as a result of inconsistent application.

The second part outlines the Ministry of Education's return to centralised approaches to moral education in the late 1990s and early part of this century. Although official documents claimed these efforts would draw upon universal moral values, in reality Russian nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy have emerged as the major theoretical foundations for moral education in state schools. Not surprisingly, the reality of Russia's ethnic and religious pluralism makes attempts to implement centralised religious approaches to moral education the subject of fierce debate. Consequently, Russian nationalism has emerged as the most widely agreed-upon foundation for moral education.

The Demise of Communist Moral Education

In contrast to the decentralised and diverse approaches to moral education found in American state schools (McClellan, 1999), Soviet educators developed and maintained a uniform and comprehensive approach to what they referred to as *vospitaniye* (translated as 'upbringing', 'character education' or 'social training') (Halstead, 1994; Brofenbrenner, 1973). Their aim, of course, was to achieve the ideal socialist society. Their methods for reaching this end included training children to develop the virtues that would bring about such a society (including patriotism, 'a conscientious attitude toward labour', discipline and collectivism, kindness to others in the community), and holding up moral models of political leaders, such as Lenin, who pursued the ideal and modelled such virtues (Tumarkin, 1997; Halstead, 1994; Jones, 1994; Kreusler, 1976;

Brofenbrenner, 1973). Soviet educators instilled this vision both through the formal education system and through communist youth organisations such as the Octobrists (*Oktyabryata*), the Pioneers (*Pionery*) and the *Komsomol* (Riordan, 1987).

After the Soviet regime fell, the Russian government discarded communist moral education and disbanded the communist youth organisations. Compulsory courses that addressed ethics, such as 'Ethics and Psychology of Family Life', ceased to be offered (Muckle, 2001). As a result, Russia's state school teachers found themselves in a moral vacuum that many perceived had tragic results (Glanzer, 2001, 2002; Sturova, 2001; Andreev, 1999; Holmes, Read and Voskresenskaya, 1995; Nikandrov, 1995; Zinchuk and Karpukhin, 1995). Moreover, with the ingrained habits Russian educators developed under communism (and earlier), they could not imagine failing to engage in *vospitaniye* (Long and Long, 1999; Higgins, 1995; Muckle, 1988, 1990). For Soviet teachers every subject, from science to music, pertained to character education. As A. F. Kiselev, first deputy minister of general and professional education of Russia, noted, 'in the Russian tradition, education never has been viewed as separate from upbringing' (Policy, 2000, p. 22). As a result, teachers sought fresh approaches to *vospitaniye* that could replace the old communist vision.

Filling the Vacuum

Russian educators entered this uncertain territory with fewer uniform models. Western educators were used to experiencing significant disagreement over how best to address moral education in their state schools (Hunter, 2000; Halstead and McLaughlin, 1999; Nash, 1997). In decentralised school systems, such as the United States, multiple approaches had been and continue to be used. Teachers may try various approaches, including 'values clarification', Lawrence Kohlberg's 'just community' approach, or some form of nonreligious 'virtue ethics' (McClellan, 1999).

In contrast to these secular models, the Russian Ministry of Education's search for new sources of *vospitaniye* led it to previously forbidden areas: religion and spirituality. Postcommunist educators wanted a moral education that would nourish the soul (*dusha*) of the student. Under communist moral education, the educator expected that this inspiration, or what Russians label *dukhovnost'* (spirituality), could be supplied by communist ideology or various forms of beauty and high culture such as art, music and literature. But after the fall of communism and the establishment of broad religious freedoms, religious sources of inspiration proved to be a popular avenue of inquiry (Halstead, 1994; Glanzer, 2001, 2002).

Faced with the intense religious hunger of the population and a new acceptance of ideological pluralism, the Russian Ministry of Education decided to allow both religious and secular groups to provide moral education. However, these groups would be allowed to teach ethics only in supplementary classes instead of as part of the required curriculum. Since most Russian groups and institutions lacked the resources to provide such classes and curricula, the Ministry of Education found itself turning to foreign religious sources for help with resources and training.

Foreign Religious Sources of Moral Education

The International School Project and the CoMission

During the last days of the Soviet Union, the Ministry of Education agreed to allow a group affiliated with one of the largest nondenominational para-church Christian

organisations in the world, Campus Crusade for Christ, to train their teachers in how to teach Christian ethics. This agreement originated when another division within Campus Crusade for Christ, the Jesus Film Project (JFP), received permission to distribute in the Soviet Union a film about the life of Jesus. JFP invited officials from the Soviet Ministry of Education to attend the film's premiere. Soon afterward, the officials asked JFP to show the film in their state schools. The leader of JFP, Paul Eshleman, not only agreed to distribute the film to Russian state schools, but also formulated the novel idea of asking the Soviet Ministry of Education to invite teachers to attend a four-day convocation in order to train them to teach Christian morals and ethics. To his surprise, the Soviet Ministry of Education and a number of other countries' education departments accepted his proposal. After the fall of the Soviet Union, many former Soviet-bloc countries, including Russia, retained interest in the proposal (Glanzer, 2002).

As a result, in 1991 Eshleman led the creation of the International School Project (ISP). Over the next six years ISP organised 126 four-day convocations in seven countries which had been part of the Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus' and Moldavia) with the permission and assistance of government officials. During the convocations, educators watched the Jesus film, learned how to use a Christian morals and ethics curriculum written by ISP, and listened to lectures about aspects of Christianity such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the reliability of the Bible. ISP trained over 41,000 educators to teach the Christian morals and ethics curriculum and ultimately grew into one of the most massive and influential undertakings in postcommunist moral education. Moreover, research found that their efforts had a significant influence on the religious beliefs of teachers (Glanzer, 2002; Vasilevskii, 1998).

In 1992 the Russian Ministry of Education allowed for the expansion of ISP's work by inviting the CoMission, a partnership of over 80 Evangelical Christian organisations, to send up to 10,000 volunteers to help with additional training. The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation and the executive committee of the CoMission signed a *Protocol of Intention*. The *Protocol* described the CoMission as a 'Christian social project' and stated that 'in order to develop cooperation in the sphere of education and the spiritual renewal of society' the two groups would work in partnership for five years to develop morals and ethics programmes and curricula for Russian state schools, distribute education materials, technological resources and other aid, develop a network of educational centres of Christian culture and conduct educational conferences and consultations. From 1992 to 1997 the CoMission sent more than 1500 missionary-educators to Russia and performed training work in more than 2500 schools. Together, ISP and the CoMission claimed to have trained over 50,000 Russian educators (Glanzer, 2002).

The Unification Church and the International Education Foundation

A second foreign religious group also made significant political inroads into Russia's state schools. In 1993 the International Educational Foundation (IEF), founded by a follower of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, worked with a professor from Vilnius University to publish a high school moral education curriculum entitled 'My World and I' for Russian state schools. In 1994 the Ministry of Education issued a positive evaluation of the text (Krylova, 2002). According to the International Educational Foundation over '10,000 schools in Russia, Mongolia and other countries of the former Soviet Union' used the text (IEF, 2003a). Moreover, claimed

IEF, 'it includes the moral and ethical teachings of the religions of the region – Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism – and thus helps to promote respect for different cultures' (IEF, 2003b). Like ISP, IEF helped provide training for teachers by sponsoring short conferences. Moreover, the texts published by ISP and IEF were intended for use in supplementary education classes, because 'upbringing' had ceased to be part of the compulsory curriculum.

The Backlash

Despite their initial political and popular success, both the CoMission and IEF understandably experienced friction with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Throughout the early 1990s the ROC rebuilt its educational activities outside the state school system, setting up Sunday schools and independent religious schools (Halstead, 1994). However, Orthodox priests also attempted to provide Christian education within state schools, with varying degrees of success. The 1992 Russian Law on Education stated that 'The establishment and activity of organisational structures of political parties, socio-political and religious movements and organisations is not permitted in state and municipal educational institutions and in administrative educational agencies' (Zakon, 1992). Like most Russian laws on this topic, it was unevenly enforced. At times, it was applied only to the ROC and not foreign religious groups. When some Orthodox priests were prohibited from entering state schools on the basis of the law, they understandably viewed the access granted to foreign religious groups to state schools as unjust (Glanzer, 2002).

The CoMission consequently encountered continual conflict with both local and national Russian Orthodox leaders during its five years of formal work in Russia. Eventually, an Orthodox priest uncovered what he claimed to be a violation of the CoMission's *Protocol* with the Ministry of Education. The *Protocol* stipulated that 'Both sides will cooperate in the development and distribution of educational materials and modern educational technological resources in the sphere of *supplemental* Christian education for schools in Russia' (Glanzer, 2002, p. 213, italics added). This Orthodox priest in Nizhni Novgorod found that a CoMission team had allowed an American to teach Russian students in required classes. Not only did this violate the *Protocol*, but according to Russian Ministry of Education officials it also violated an understanding that CoMissioners should not teach students directly. The resulting political fallout led the Russian Ministry of Education to cancel the CoMission *Protocol* (Glanzer, 2002).

The work of the Unification Church and IEF experienced similar pressure from the ROC in the 1990s. In 1994 the ROC placed the Unification Church on its list of 'anti-Christian and pseudo-Christian sects'. After that the government began publishing warnings about the Unification Church and hampered its efforts to register its religious groups (Krylova, 2002). Orthodox leaders also raised criticisms about the unfairness of forbidding Orthodox priests entry to the classroom while allowing in materials published by an organisation (IEF) affiliated with the Unification Church. For instance, M. P. Sturova, a professor in the Academy of Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Akademiya upravleniya Ministerstva vnutrennikh del Rossii*), noted at a December 1998 roundtable discussion organised by the editors of the education journal *Pedagogika* on the subject 'The state's school policy and the upbringing of the rising generation' ('*Shkol'naya politika gosudarstva i vospitaniye podrastayushchego pokoleniya*');

According to Article 5 of the law [on education], any activity by religious movements and organizations is not permitted in state-run education institutions, inasmuch as schools are secular institutions and are separate from the Church. This provision closes off access to the schools by Orthodox teachings of the kind that do the most to foster the formation of the morality of the rising generation. Meanwhile, Paragraph 6 of Article 2 proclaims freedom and pluralism, which has made it possible for the followers of Reverend Moon and other religious sectarians to become established in the schools, including those located in places of confinement. (Policy, 2000, p. 46)

According to Sturova, this situation resulted in a clear injustice: 'Orthodox religion is not permitted because Orthodox priests have nothing more to contribute than the words of love and goodness, while wealthy Western and Eastern preachers, whose activities only serve to destroy the mentality of the Russian people, are permitted' (Policy, 2000, pp. 46–47; see also Sturova, 2001).

Eventually in 2000 the viceminister of education, Aleksandr Kondakov, sent a letter to the rectors of universities and education directors in Russian *oblasti* 'strongly urging them to take measures to prohibit International Educational textbook materials within the educational system of Russia' on the basis that 'the Unification Church, founded by Sun Myung Moon, is a pseudo-Christian religious organization' (Krylova, 2002, p. 2).

In the end, the Russian government, largely at the behest of the ROC, prohibited the CoMission and IEF, both of which had previously received some form of Russian Ministry of Education sanction for their materials and work, from doing further work in the country. This prohibition, however, did not apply to the work of ISP, which continues to conduct teacher training conferences introducing educators to ISP's ethics curriculum.

Back to Old Russia: the Return to a Centralised Programme of *Vospitaniye*

As noted above, these foreign efforts to supply moral education material and training pertained only to supplementary education classes. During the early 1990s the Ministry of Education removed compulsory forms of community moral education, but it did not mandate that any of the new approaches to 'upbringing' be part of the compulsory curriculum. There were also arguments that this situation should not be changed. Nikolai Nikandrov, president of the Russian Academy of Education (*Rossiiskaya Akademiya obrazovaniya*), noted at a 1999 conference organised by the Academy and entitled 'Upbringing in the Spirit of Patriotism, Friendship of Peoples, and Religious Tolerance' (*Vospitaniye v dukhe patriotizma, druzhby narodov i veroterpimosti*) that during the first years of independent Russia 'people started to say that the schools did not need to provide upbringing but only instruction, that upbringing amounted to coercion against the individual. To reinforce their argument they referred to L. N. Tolstoy, who had expressed similar notions about the incompatibility of upbringing and freedom' (Upbringing, 2001, p. 16).

The situation began to change in the late 1990s. The 1998 reinstatement of the Administration of Upbringing Work (*Upravleniye vospitateĭnoi raboty*) in the Ministry of Education signalled a return to centralised government emphasis upon *vospitaniye* in the required curriculum. The roundtable sponsored by *Pedagogika* mentioned previously and held the same year reinforced this trend by emphasising

topics such as 'Upbringing and the national security of Russia' and 'What kind of generation we bring up depends on the words and deeds of the state' (Policy, 2000, p. 10). Nationalistic themes dominated the discussion. Speakers continually made reference to the need to strengthen Russian patriotism which they believed to be the foundation of upbringing. For instance, R. S. Boziyev, vicepresident of the Russian Academy of Education and editor-in-chief of *Pedagogika*, claimed that 'any person who does not love and have a sense of pride in his motherland will not be able to understand and respect others' (Policy, 2000, p. 56). A. Ye. Andreyev, president of the National Russian School Foundation (*Natsional'ny fond 'Russkaya Shkola'*), likewise argued for a system of upbringing based on Russia nationalism:

For many Russian people, the only factor that still unites them is the entry on the nationality line of their passport . . . This is a national tragedy. In the battle between good and evil, help must come from the Russian school, the tried and true centuries-old system of national upbringing and education founded on the ideas of the greatness and richness of the land of Russia, the unity of its people, its shared Slavic roots, the ideas of dedication and valor and the upbringing potential of the Russian language, literature and history. (Policy, 2000, p. 57)

Speakers also echoed statements from communist times by drawing a link between *vospitaniye* and national security. For example, N. P. Zolotova, of the Analysis Administration of the Apparatus of the Council of Federation of Russia (*Analiticheskoye upravleniye Soveta Federatsii Rossii*), claimed that 'Overcoming destructive tendencies in the spiritual development of society is a matter of this country's national security. The lack of a civic stance, the loss of any sense of patriotism, and the break with the traditions of national culture can only benefit opportunists' (Policy, 2000, p. 20).

Much of this talk about lost patriotism and love for the motherland stemmed from an understandable reaction to social events in Russia during the previous decade. Russia's fall from power and the associated economic, social and moral troubles, as well as significant levels of emigration from Russia, left education leaders with a profound sense of the need to rebuild Russia's pride. Russian educators hoped that a revival of state-directed approaches to *vospitaniye* could help reverse these unwelcome trends.

New or Old Russian Ideas for Moral Education?

Russian or Universal Values?

In September 1999 the Russian Ministry of Education published a *Programme for the Development of Upbringing in the Russian System of Education (Programma razvitiya vospitaniya v sisteme obrazovaniya)* (Program, 2001). The *Programme* outlined the new social conditions in which renewed attempts to undertake *vospitaniye* were being made, lamented the lack of various resources to undertake the task, pointed out the new democratic realities that would govern any approach to *vospitaniye* and spelled out 'the aims, goals and directions for improving the organization of upbringing in the educational system' (Program, 2001, p. 2). The *Programme* insisted that the primary problem with *vospitaniye* stemmed from 'the lack of a state strategy when it comes to

matters of the upbringing of children and young people'. It therefore argued that the traditional Russian approach of centralised state control should be used to solve the problem:

The state bears responsibility for the current state of children's upbringing in the same way that it bears responsibility for assuring the rights of the individual and citizen, and this necessitates the formulation and implementation of state policy in the field of the upbringing of the rising generation. (Program, 2001, p. 4)

The *Programme* signalled that the Ministry of Education had moved from welcoming and exploring diverse models of moral education within a decentralised system of supplementary education to returning to a Soviet-style system with an emphasis upon federally mandated forms of moral education within the compulsory curriculum.

Nonetheless, the new approach differed significantly from the communist method. According to the *Programme*, the state needed to clarify its role in relation to the upbringing work of parents, nongovernmental organisations and other players in society. Moreover, the *Programme* continually acknowledged the need to respect and support a 'diversity of upbringing systems'. The acceptance of both civil society and pluralism appeared to be at least one enduring feature in the approach to moral education in postcommunist Russia.

The apparent acceptance of the existence of civil society and of a schooling system adapted to Russian pluralism nevertheless raised a question: what would be the ideological basis and the aims of the new forms of moral education? This question is discussed in rather general terms in the *Programme*, but two principal themes emerge. The nature of *vospitaniye* is summarised as follows:

A directed activity, to be carried out within the system of education, oriented toward the creation of the conditions necessary for development of spirituality in school on the basis of universal human values and the values of this people (*narod*); also, to provide them with help in finding their way in life and in their moral, civic, and professional development. (Program, 2001, p. 12)

The document also places emphasis upon the development of patriotism in students: 'Civic and patriotic upbringing constitutes one of the most important elements in the state's education policy' (Program, 2001, p. 10).

The *Programme* thus suggests that universal human values and Russian values should both be at the basis of moral teaching. In one of the later sections of the *Programme* the writers express the belief that universal human values should trump local values whenever a conflict arises: 'The principle of cultural appropriateness requires that upbringing be based on universal human values in accordance with the values and norms of the national cultural and regional traditions that are not in conflict with universal human values' (Program, 2001, p. 14). In this sense, the proposal appears to outline an approach to upbringing which resembles American forms of character education (see for example Ryan and Bohlin, 1999), in that it suggests inculcating a thin conception of agreed-upon virtues or values.

Various reports, conference discussions and papers addressing *vospitaniye* also appear to endorse this view. According to the editors of *Pedagogika*, discussing the 1999 roundtable mentioned above ('*Vospitaniye v dukhe patriotizma, druzhby narodov i*

veroterpimosti'), 'many of the speakers state that the new Russian idea will have to incorporate universal human values along with the age-old Russian values that have stood the test of time' (Upbringing, 2001, p. 16). Nonetheless, some educational leaders expressed pessimism about finding universal or general human values upon which they could agree (Nikandrov, 1995, 1999). For example, Aleksei Vodyansky, deputy director of the Department of Public Education of the Ministry of Education (*Departament obshchego obrazovaniya Ministerstva obrazovaniya*), told one newspaper:

The most difficult thing now is to establish a system of values that is common for all people. Recently we asked eminent specialists to write a school textbook on ethics. It did not come out. There are too many different ideas about this among scholars. I do not think that there should be a special subject that trains moral people. (Schools, 2003)

Moreover, educators and politicians at conferences frequently placed greater emphasis on Russian patriotism and distinctively Russian sources of moral education. At a meeting of the Political Consultative Council in January 2000 called by the Russian Federation State Committee on Public Education entitled 'A system of education to strengthen the intellectual and spiritual potential of Russia' (*'Sistema obrazovaniya – dlya ukrepleniya intellektual'nogo i dukhovnogo potentsiala Rossii'*) Nikolai Nikandrov named three core elements that could be derived from Russia's distinctive history and culture: national character (*narodnost'*); patriotism; and 'Russia's traditional spirituality' (System, 2001, p. 92). Summarising the 1999 conference mentioned above, the editors of *Pedagogika* claimed that 'the participants in the conference were deeply gratified by the intention of the leaders of Russia's government to do away with the ideological vacuum that exists in this country and to form a new national ideology with patriotism as its foundation' (Upbringing, 2001, p.15).

Some of the support for this concept is couched in terms which recall the old communist ideals of a unified, comprehensive system of upbringing designed to serve the state's ends. An extreme example can be found in A. I. Piatikop and V. I. Shamardin's 2001 essay 'Vospitaniye patriota' in which they describe the moral education programme they implemented in a school in Kaliningrad. They incorporated nationalism into every facet of the school's approach to upbringing, and proudly claim that 'In our region . . . the tasks of educating the rising generation in the spirit of the ideals of patriotism are always given top priority' (Piatikop and Shamardin, 2001, p. 53). They established a military culture in their school with a military routine and military dress and a curriculum that focuses upon military subjects, including study of 'the ethics of the soldier'. Piatikop and Shamardin also brought in soldiers as prime moral models and hold it as a source of pride that in ten years not one student has attempted to avoid military conscription. Their *vospitaniye* scheme is basically built upon the state's interest in defence and self-preservation and gives little attention to universal moral values.

Interestingly, however, one speaker advocating a similar form of nationalistic education at the 1999 conference mentioned above, S. A. Aliyeva from Dagestan State Pedagogical University, expressed the view that distinctively Russian values of patriotism are consistent with universal values:

As we train our young people to be ready to defend the motherland we are bringing them closer, regardless of their national affiliation, to supreme

human values, namely the preservation of peace, of the human habitat and of human culture in general ... What is needed today is a new system of military and patriotic upbringing for the citizens of Russia. The development of such a system has to be of a comprehensive character; it has to shape the civic consciousness of young people, take account of all the stages of the life of an individual, and develop the individual's dialectical materialistic worldview. (Upbringing, 2001, p. 32)

Such sentiments, including the encouragement of the 'dialectical materialistic worldview', clearly hark back to the Soviet past.

Russian Values and Russian Orthodoxy

It is, however, the role in *vospitaniye* of the third element mentioned by Nikandrov, 'Russia's traditional spirituality', which has excited the most debate. Should religion, or more particularly Russian Orthodoxy, become a primary resource for moral education? Nikandrov recommended using inclusive terms: 'I realise that Russia is a multiethnic country, and therefore, while accepting for myself the Orthodox faith as the first part of a Russian national idea, I suggest that it might be expressed differently and in milder terms - Russia's traditional spirituality' (System, 2001, p. 92). Spokesmen for the ROC, however, pressed for a distinctive role for Orthodoxy. Fr Ioann Ekonomtsev, chairman of the Department of Religious Education and Catechisation of the Moscow Patriarchate of Moscow (*Otdel religioznogo obrazovaniya i katekhizatsii*), claimed that 'What is needed is an overall, national strategy for the establishment of *vospitaniye* in schools. And not to draw upon the Orthodox Church in this, as well as other religions, would be simply criminal' (Policy, 2000, p. 65).

The 1999 *Programme* struck a pluralistic note and did not even mention the ROC as a source of *vospitaniye*. Nevertheless, influential figures continued to argue for a role for Russian Orthodoxy. For example, Yu. Yakovlev, a member of the Political Consultative Council (*Politichesky konsul'tativny sovet*), stated at the same 1999 meeting (mentioned above) at which Nikandrov broached the idea:

The question of upbringing has been raised here. Indeed the country is looking for a national idea. We have given up the old one but have not found a new one. For some reason we have forgotten Russia's thousand-year experience, it was the idea of the Orthodox faith and the ideas generated by the faiths of the other peoples of Russia that have brought us from the little Principality of Moscow to our vast country. Even those who today live within the territory of CIS and now are citizens of different countries gravitate toward Russia ... What this means is that there has been something attractive in the global Russian idea, that there has been a reason for the various peoples to unite around Russians, around the Orthodox faith, around Russia. (System, 2001, pp. 88–89)

Key personalities in positions of power agreed. In August 1999 the Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the Moscow Patriarchate to implement 'joint programmes to enhance spirituality in the development of education in Russia' (Filippov, 2001, p. 11). These programmes included joint efforts 'to combat the spread of smoking, alcoholism, narcotics abuse and violence among young people', and

efforts gradually to apply standards in the academic specialities ‘Theology’ and ‘Religious Studies’ (Filippov, 2001, p. 11). Patriarch Aleksii of the ROC even expressed the hope that high schools would teach ‘Orthodox ethics’ (Bellaby, 2002). Vladimir Filippov, the minister of education, signalled a willingness to pursue this path. He concluded one talk with such sentiments:

I should like to express my confidence that joint efforts on the part of the schools and the church, these two primary, mutually reinforcing pillars of spiritual life in our fatherland, will ensure the enhancement of the level of education and spirituality of society on a high level in keeping with the needs of the individual, the needs of the country’s future, and the enduring ideals and values of Humanity and the Orthodox faith. (Filippov, 2001, p. 14)

Filippov and the Ministry of Education soon supported these words with a specific initiative. In October 2002 the Russian Ministry of Education introduced a new course called ‘Orthodox Culture’ into the core curriculum. Filippov officially presented the class to regional education offices by a letter that included a sample of course content. According to Filippov’s letter, regional officials and school heads would have the option of including the course in the obligatory curriculum. The authors of the sample curriculum attached to the letter outlined an 11-year curriculum for the course and recommended that, ideally, children would study the material for 544 hours over those 11 years. One commentator and critic later noted that ‘this is more than is devoted to physics, chemistry or music’ (Moiseenko and Pavlova, 2002). The curriculum authors also advised schools to invite priests to teach the course.

At a church-state conference on 22 October three presidential plenipotentiaries in federal districts explained the justification for the course at a news conference. One argued that the state could not be ‘indifferent to what kinds of worldviews society formulates’. Another justified the course on the basis of the economic and political interests of the state, claiming that religious education would help instil the feeling of patriotism lost during *perestroika*, while a third claimed that the demographic crisis in Russia had moral origins and therefore needed a spiritual solution: ‘It is necessary to strengthen the spiritual and moral foundations of society and it is unrealistic that this can be done without turning to Russia’s traditions’ (Vasilenko, 2002).

The ROC advanced different reasons for supporting the course that sounded both liberal and traditional. ROC spokesmen maintained that the course provided a choice of religious worldviews for students and added a moral dimension to the curriculum. The patriarch told the church-state conference at which the ministry introduced the course:

The moral disorientation of many young people, their loss of a meaning in life, becomes the soil for various vices and threatens Russia’s future. That is why all of us – religious leaders, [state] authorities and society – have to realize that schools should give not only a sum of knowledge, but also an upbringing. (Zolotov, 2002)

The Moscow Patriarchate also claimed that the course discussed Orthodox culture, not Orthodox theology or the Law of God (*Zakon Bozhi*).

The initiative aroused a passionate debate within Russia. Immediately after the introduction of the course proposal, a survey by the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* found that 71 per cent of respondents opposed the course (Radio, 2002). Politicians joined

the fray. For example, Aleksei Volin, deputy head of the Russian Governmental Administration (*Apparat Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*), argued that the proposal showed disrespect for Russia's secular, pluralistic democracy:

It is dangerous to introduce classes in Orthodox religion in a multi-confessional and multiethnic country like Russia . . . As a secular state, the Russian Federation should not allow any religious teaching in a state school. I think this document reeks of the Middle Ages and obscurantism. (Russian, 2002)

Interestingly, for the last remark some Orthodox would later claim that Volin should be held criminally accountable for 'savage offense to the feelings of Orthodox citizens' (Mikhailina and Litvinov, 2003).

Critics also pointed out that the suggested outline of the course showed that it imitated an Orthodox theology course taught in ecclesiastical seminaries. Consequently, 'under the guise of a secular religious studies discipline, children will receive a purely confessional theological education' (Nedumov, 2002). Certainly, critics maintained, the proposed course did not demonstrate neutrality towards various religious groups. At one point the curriculum stated that 'The graduate of the ninth grade should be able to explain . . . distinctive features of the apocalyptic notions of destructive religious sects'. Orthodoxy, critics maintained, would be forced on students through the compulsory curriculum as opposed to merely being available in private schools. Nedumov argued that such a course of action would backfire:

In attempting to force Russian pupils to study the foundations of Orthodox doctrine, the leadership [of the Russian Orthodox Church] apparently has forgotten that such a crude imposition of faith can lead to a directly opposite result. The pre-Revolutionary gymnasia in which the Law of God was a required subject, and classes began with prayer, actually bred a generation of people who were indifferent to religion and aggressive with respect to the church. (Nedumov, 2002)

Filippov later issued a response to critics in the form of a new order further defining the subject. He clarified that the curriculum was not obligatory but would only be taught as an optional subject. Despite these reassurances, commentators argued that the recommendations were 'quite strong, very much like direct orders' (Moiseenko and Pavlova, 2002).

The controversy became further complicated when a textbook with the same name as the proposed course, *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture*, became the subject of a major public debate. The textbook, written by Alla Borodina, appeared to be the main academic resource for the proposed course. It had been classified as 'Recommended by the Coordinating Council on Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church'. According to news reports, this classification did not permit it to be used as a textbook in state schools (Discussion, 2003). A group called 'For Human Rights' (*Za prava cheloveka*) called for a judicial investigation into the use of the book which they claimed represented a confessional apology for Orthodoxy. Their judicial appeal eventually failed. Consequently, the group made an appeal to the Ministry of Education to try and prohibit the use of the textbook in schools (Moscow, 2003a). This long-running controversy was probably one cause of the announcement by the Ministry of

Education on 6 June 2003 that it would set up a working group to prepare a model curriculum for the optional 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' course (Order, 2003).

In a matter unrelated to the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' course but indicative of the Ministry of Education's direction the Ministry also clarified in a 1 July 2003 order that registered religious groups could teach voluntary religion classes in state schools as long as they received permission from the local administration, the parents and the children. It also noted that the literature and resources needed to be clearly identified as belonging to the religious organisation. Not surprisingly, the Orthodox Church welcomed the order while minority religions expressed concern about the order being unfairly implemented and enforced (Taratuta, 2003).

Despite the Ministry of Education's strong support for the course and the voluntary teaching of religion, opposition to both remained strong. A group of opponents called the 'Common Action' ('*Obshcheye deistviye*') initiative group claimed 'we consider it impermissible that a monopoly on informing pupils about the history and ideology of the church should be granted to religious organizations', and also argued that was 'unacceptable to us to create unilateral privileges in the form of providing school premises for only one category of public organizations, namely religious associations that have permanent registration' (Rights, 2003).

Specific school districts also opposed implementing the course. During the 2002–03 and 2003–04 school years the course was not offered in Moscow schools. The director of the capital's Department of Education, Lyubov' Kezina, said 'We did not support the letter that arrived from the Ministry of Education regarding the introduction of fundamentals of Orthodox culture. Our schools are secular and state supported. Schools are separated from the church' (Moscow, 2003b).

Nonetheless, reports surfaced throughout the following years that other districts, such as Kursk and Tambov, were supporting the teaching of the course (Administration, 2003; Trial, 2004). During that time Kezina also received pressure from a group of State Duma deputies who sent a letter to Filippov indicating support for making the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' a part of the federal curriculum and teaching the class in Moscow.

In February 2004 an additional option was proposed by Kezina. She suggested that schools teach the history of religion as an elective subject. A month later Kezina gained important support from Andrei Fursenko, who replaced Filippov as minister of education and became leader of the new department, the Ministry of Education and Science. He confessed support for a required history of religions course but noted 'I am not talking about teaching only the history of Christianity', although he added that the important role of Christianity in Russia 'should be reflected in the teaching of history' (Minister, 2004). Later in the year elective courses in the history of religion were introduced in Tartarstan and Kabardino-Balkaria (History, 2004; Schools, 2004). The extent to which the history of religion courses or the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' course will be implemented throughout Russia is not yet clear.

Conclusion

The new direction for moral education in Russia now involves the reinforcement of traditional Russian values. While some official documents suggest basing contemporary Russian moral education upon universal moral values and respect for pluralism, most of the academic discussion about the proper basis for *vospitaniye* currently centres upon patriotism and national security. Indeed, it seems that these

two themes gain the most widespread consensual support as a basis and justification for moral education in Russia's state schools. Meanwhile one consistent feature appears to be that religious influence upon moral education of whatever kind – western Christian, non-Christian or Russian Orthodox – sparks the most controversy. Although the ROC has successfully helped to banish the influence of the first two groups from Russian state schools, it is now enmeshed in its own struggle to influence *vospitaniye*, and its involvement in moral education is likely to remain a source of controversy for the foreseeable future.

With the support of the ROC the Ministry of Education has attempted to address this controversy and find a balance by supporting a three-pronged approach to religion in state schools. First, it now favours teaching a history of religions course and possibly even making it a required subject. This approach finds support in areas of Russia with sizeable non-Christian religious minorities. Second, it supports allowing teaching of religion by registered religious groups in state schools on a voluntary basis with local and parental approval. Third, it appears still to want to support the teaching of the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' in districts where there is significant support. Whether this three-part solution will actually hinder or support religious freedom in Russia, especially the religious freedom of minority religions, remains to be seen. What appears clear is that nontraditional and nonregistered religious minorities in Russia are likely to be second-class citizens when it comes to religious freedom and education.

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