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Multiculturalism and Religious Education in the Russian Federation: The *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics*

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Over the last decade, the Russian Federation has turned sharply away from the secular foundations of its 1993 constitution and moved toward the model of a confessional state — a model that strikingly resembles the state-sponsored hierarchy of religions in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. Increasingly, the Russian state actively cooperates with certain favored religious organizations, labeled “traditional,” to achieve its social and political goals. One of the clearest manifestations of this developing relationship between the state and “traditional” religious institutions is the Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics, a new national program of spiritual and moral education for the public schools. Since September 2012, all pupils in fourth and fifth grades must take a total of 34 hours of the Fundamentals, designed to promote religious tolerance, patriotism and morality. In their current form, the Fundamentals represent a compromise between advocates of confessionalization, who argue for the benefits of greater religious influence on the state, and strict secularists.

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OVER the last decade, the Russian Federation has turned sharply away from the secular foundations of its 1993 constitution and moved toward the model of a confessional state — a model that strikingly resembles the state-sponsored hierarchy of religions in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. Increasingly, the Russian state actively cooperates with certain favored religious organizations, labeled “traditional,” to achieve its social and political goals. As in the Russian Empire, which recognized a select number of denominations that enjoyed special privileges (including the right to teach religion to primary school children), the contemporary Russian government grants special status to those religions it deems to be “traditional” — those religions that “comprise an integral part of the historical heritage

of the peoples of Russia,” in the words of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations (Russian Federation 1997; Butler and Henderson 1998: 117). Although the modern Russian Federation is certainly far more secular than its imperial predecessor, which had to rely on religious institutions to keep track of vital statistics and to regulate marriage, in the last fifteen years, the Russian state has gradually departed from its constitutional commitment to treat all religions equally (Article 14) and instead increasingly has partnered with “traditional” religious associations to advance social welfare and other projects of national importance. One of the clearest manifestations of this developing relationship between the state and “traditional” religious institutions is the *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics*, a new national program of spiritual and moral education for the public schools. A highly controversial, complex course, the *Fundamentals* were introduced as a pilot program in 2009 by President Dmitry Medvedev and became a required part of the national curriculum three years later. The *Fundamentals* have emerged from the Russian Federation’s unique past as the heir to both the Soviet Union — the first officially atheist state in history — and the multiconfessional Russian Empire, which reserved a leading role for the Orthodox Church. The *Fundamentals*, and the debates that have surrounded their implementation, offer a valuable perspective on the evolution of Russia’s constitutional secularism and the growing role of religion in public life. In their current form, the *Fundamentals* represent a compromise between advocates of confessionalization, who argue for the benefits of greater religious influence on the state, and strict secularists, who regard such influence with deep suspicion. Without question, however, the *Fundamentals* demonstrate a historic shift away from strict secularism toward a prerevolutionary model favoring certain religious organizations.

With its secular constitution and enormous demographic diversity, Russia faces great challenges in developing a universal program of spiritual and moral education. In a delicate balancing act, the Russian educational establishment has sought to draw on the rich spiritual and cultural resources of Russia’s “traditional” religions while at the same time maintaining, in some sense, Russia’s constitutional commitments to secular governance and secular education. Since September 2012, all pupils in fourth and fifth grades must take a total of 34 hours of the *Fundamentals*, designed to promote religious tolerance, patriotism and morality. Beginning in the second semester of the fourth grade, the *Fundamentals* are offered for an hour each week. Significantly, the *Fundamentals* provide parents a choice among six different modules that their grade-school children can study: a course in secular ethics, a world religions survey, or a course in one of the four “traditional” religions of Russia (as suggested by the preamble to the 1997 Law

on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations) – Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam. The Ministry of Education and Science has invested millions of rubles into training a cadre of teachers to implement the new curriculum; many of the approved textbooks are available online, and educational authorities have established websites, Twitter accounts, and YouTube channels devoted to the new course.¹

By introducing this new program, the Russian Federation has asserted the state's vested interest in ensuring the moral and spiritual development of its citizens; bad religion (such as "totalitarian cults" or Islamic extremism) threatens the security of Russian society. This concern about "totalitarian cults" (a term borrowed from the Western anti-cult movement) arose as early as May 1994 when an international seminar of Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic leaders met on the campus of the Russian Academy of Administration to discuss the danger of non-traditional religion for post-Soviet Russia ("Poniatie totalitarnoi sekty" 1994; Kholmogorov 1994; "Itogovoe zaiavlenie" 1994). Orthodox heresiologists continue to employ the term against new religious movements (Egortsev 1997; Novopashin 2005; Shvechikov and Moroz 2005; *Sovremennye netraditsionnye religii* 2006; Osipov 2007; Kovalenko and Usanov 2009; Dvorkin 2012). By strengthening the "traditional" religions of Russia, the *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* is designed to reinforce Russia's "spiritual security," a subject of great interest to many scholars, military officers, and law enforcement officials (Chizhik 2000; Tykva 2008; Khvyliia-Olinter 2008; Bepalenko 2009; Tonkonogov 2009; Viktorov 2009; Syrovatkin 2013; Rybakov 2013). The new program has also federalized the standards for spiritual and moral education, taking them out of the hands of regions and individual school directors and making them part of a uniform curriculum across the federation (Ministerstvo obrazovaniia i nauki 2012). The new curriculum recognizes the multiconfessional nature of Russian society. At the same time, it favors particular religious institutions and communities that are officially recognized as "traditional." Just as the Russian state had chosen the winners in the privatization of state assets in the mid-1990s by selling valuable firms at favorable rates to well-connected oligarchs, so, too, did it seek to choose the winners in the religious field, by a policy of favoring "traditional" religions (on the privatization, see Freeland 2000; McFaul 2001; Goldman, 2003; for a different view, see Leonard and Pitt-Watson 2013).

As in the prerevolutionary classroom, religious education is designed to produce moral people. According to one teacher's guide, "the goal of the *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* is to

1. For example, <http://www.orkce.org>; <https://twitter.com/orkce>.

motivate pupils toward moral behavior that is based on the knowledge of and respect for the cultural and religious traditions of the multinational people of Russia and toward dialogue with the representatives of other cultures and worldviews” (Pokasov 2013). The guide makes clear, however, that the course is not intended to teach religious doctrine; unlike the prerevolutionary courses, the *Fundamentals* are not meant to make good Muslims or good Orthodox believers: “*The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* does not include the teaching of religion. The phrase ‘the teaching of religion’ signifies the teaching of religious doctrine” (Pokasov 2013). At the same time, the *Fundamentals* favor “traditional” religions, whose clergy are to serve on the coordinating council and have a voice in training teachers. Within legal limits, municipal organs must cooperate with “traditional” local religious organizations, whose representatives should be part of the coordinating council. Likewise, local “traditional” religious communities must have a voice in the training of teachers and the methods of teaching.

Religious Instruction in the Russian Empire

The new curricular program draws on Russia’s prerevolutionary experience in moral education without simply repeating it. In the Russian Empire, which never instituted a system of universal public education, moral and religious instruction was an essential part of the primary school curriculum. Moreover, most primary schooling was in the hands of religious communities, from Buddhist monasteries (*datsans*) near Lake Baikal to Muslim *maktabs* on the middle Volga to the Russian Orthodox church-parish schools across the empire (Dowler 2001; Sartikova 2009; Snapkovskaia 2011; Kefeli 2014). Although the Orthodox church was established, the empire included many religious minorities, and religion played an essential social and legal role that it lost after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Every imperial subject had to have a religion, an attribute that was usually determined by birth and was recorded in one’s passport (Steinwedel 2001: 67–92; Baiburin 2009: 140–54). Religious communities kept vital records and determined much of family law; Muslim males, for example, could marry up to four wives, as permitted by the shariah, even though Orthodox men had to be satisfied with monogamy. Civil marriage did not exist in the empire (Wagner 1994). The Russian legal code, systematized in the mid-nineteenth century, established a hierarchy of a handful of recognized religions that could play these important social functions. At the top of this hierarchy was the established Orthodox Church, the required religion for the imperial family. Just below Orthodoxy were the rec-

ognized heterodox Christian confessions (*inoslavie*), including the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the faith of the Finns and most of the Baltic and Volga Germans), and the Roman Catholic Church (dominant among the Lithuanians and Poles). On the third rung of the hierarchy stood *inoverie*, the recognized non-Christian religions of Judaism (especially prominent in Poland and western Ukraine) and Islam (the faith of many millions in Central Asia and the Caucasus), and Tibetan Buddhism, the religion of the Buriats and Kalmyks. Paganism (the catch-all term for the traditional ethnic religions of indigenous peoples as varied as the Tungus, Cheremis [Mari], Chukchi, and Yakuts) remained at the bottom of the hierarchy. The emperor or his representative appointed the spiritual leaders of these officially recognized religious communities.

In a society in which religion played such a vital legal role (determining whom one could marry, where one could live, or whether one's children were legitimate) religious instruction had to be an essential part of all primary education. In the extensive public school system established by the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment in the last decades of the ancien regime, religious instruction took up nine of the total 24 weekly hours of school time (Eklof 1986: 487). Pupils who belonged to one of the recognized religious minority faiths, such as Islam or Lutheranism, studied their own faith during the hours devoted to the Law of God (*Zakon Bozhii*). Significantly, the state sought to inculcate religious faith through education — and not simply the established faith, but the faith of the pupil's religious community, whether Buddhist, Muslim, or Armenian. No effort was made to provide education *about* religion; primary schools did not offer objective surveys in world religions, but normative instruction on the doctrines, practices, and ethics of a single faith.

Soviet Moral Education

This system of religious instruction came to an end with the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent Soviet decree of January 1918 that separated church from state and school from church. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union introduced compulsory universal, militantly secular, public primary education that was part of the broader Marxist-Leninist project to create a new civilization and a new kind of human being, the new Soviet man (Fitzpatrick 1970). Not content to separate education from religion, the Soviet Union closed, confiscated, or physically destroyed the vast religious infrastructure that had provided a substantial portion of the primary education in the empire. The cultural revolution that accompanied the First Five-Year Plan (1929–32) resulted in the arrest and execution of thousands of clerics, mul-

lahs, lamas, and other religious specialists who had, in the past, taken responsibility for the moral instruction of the next generation. For example, religious persecution reduced the number of Orthodox clerics from 66,140 in 1917 to 6,367 in 1940 — a loss of over 90 percent (Dickinson 2000: 332). In 1929, a new law on religious associations — which remained in effect for the next six decades — drastically curtailed freedom of conscience and placed strict state controls on religious life. In the same year, the Congress of Soviets amended the constitution to deprive believers of the right to conduct religious propaganda while assuring all citizens the right to engage in anti-religious propaganda. For Soviet authorities, religion had no place in the moral education of children, and their brutal, state-sponsored destruction of believers and religious institutions had a deep and long-lasting impact on those religious communities that survived the Soviet period. As a legacy of this persecution, some religious believers are deeply suspicious of secular approaches to spiritual education or to the study of religion. To allay such suspicions, the post-Soviet Russian Ministry of Education and Science has on some occasions explicitly noted that “secular” (*svetskii*) is not synonymous with “atheistic” or “anti-religious” (Ministerstvo obrazovaniia 1999).

Soviet pedagogues sought to develop methods of moral education that did not rely on religious instruction. Anton Semenovich Makarenko (1888–1939), who emerged as a leading theorist in the 1930s, worked out his ideas in labor colonies for orphans (*besprizorniki*) (Stevens 1982: 242–64; Stolee 1988: 64–83; Goldman 1993; Ball 1994; Stone 2012). Highly suspicious of the Western emphasis on individual autonomy, he encouraged his pupils to love the collective, the ultimate source of moral authority. Only in the collective could the individual personality flourish (Makarenko 1950–52; Lilge 1958; Bowen 1962; Gritsenko 2013: 97–102). The challenge of the Second World War intensified the efforts of Soviet pedagogues to instill love for the collective and for the motherland in their young charges (Kuznetsova 2006: 95–102; Shchegolev 2007: 76–85; Gordina 2011: 58–71). Soviet education was designed to develop character both through formal instruction in particular subjects as well as through extracurricular activities, such as involvement in the Young Pioneers and the Communist Youth League. All elements of Soviet education were supposed to help inculcate the “moral code of the builder of Communism,” as the 22nd Party Congress put it in 1961 (“Programma Kommunisticheskoi partii” 1961). This moral code included devotion to the communist cause, love of the socialist motherland, a collectivist attitude, honesty, mutual respect, moral purity, and modesty (Malkova 1964). A biology textbook published in the 1980s, for example, argued that science education, which had to be systematically atheistic, helped

to build character by “exposing the antiscientific character” of religious belief and convincing pupils of the correctness of scientific materialism (Muckle 1987: 1–22). Although formally voluntary, the Octobrists, Young Pioneers, and the Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*) were effectively compulsory for most Soviet children and youth; only the most devout and uncompromising religious believers prevented their children from joining these explicitly anti-religious organizations, and they often suffered public excoriation for their refusal (Vigilianskii 2004; Livschiz 2007; Baran 2014: 43, 130, 181). These organizations provided most of the camping, sporting, and other extracurricular group activities available to Soviet pupils; as part of their mission, they sought to promote “socially useful labor” and to instill socialist values into their members (Muckle 1987: 1–22).

Religion in Post-Soviet Russian Classroom, 1992-1997

In the post-Soviet period, the collapse of the Communist Party (and the moral system that it represented) left many former Soviet citizens concerned about a moral vacuum. For most former Soviets, devotion to the Communist cause, the main pillar of the “moral code of the builder of Communism,” could not be defended in light of Marxism-Leninism’s many ethical and practical failures. But what could take its place? And how could moral training be institutionalized in the school system?

The legislation and educational policy of the early 1990s affirmed the separation of religion and state. In 1990, both the USSR and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic passed laws that reversed decades of Soviet anti-religious policy for a wide-ranging religious freedom. One section of the Russian law explicitly permitted teaching about religion in public schools: “The teaching of religion in an academic or epistemological framework [...] not accompanied by rites and ceremonies and informative in nature, may be included in the educational program of state institutions” (Russian Federation 1990 [1995]). On this legal basis, some regions — and even individual school principals — introduced elective courses on religion. As early as 1991, for example, the Smolensk region formally introduced the study of Orthodox Christian culture as an elective course in state schools (Divnogortseva 2011: 57).

Initially, the newly independent Russian republic affirmed secularism as a principle of public instruction (Dneprov 1991). A new law on education passed in 1992 specifically excluded political parties and religious organizations from state schools (Russian Federation 1992). Education was to be democratic, pluralistic, and secular. At the same time, the law called for the promotion of values “common to all human-

ity”: citizenship, respect for human rights and freedom, and love for one’s family and homeland. The law also recognized the multinational character of the Russian Federation, guaranteeing education in national cultures and regional cultural traditions. For many teachers and school directors, religion formed an integral part of national culture, and many schools across the country introduced courses that included the study of local religious traditions. In the Republic of Tatarstan, for example, the numbers of public schools teaching Tatar language and culture rapidly increased in the 1990s; these schools necessarily also taught about Muslim doctrines, customs, and rituals that played an important role in Tatar history and literature (Koroleva et al. 2012).

One of the earliest (and in hindsight doomed) efforts to reintroduce a formal system of moral education into post-Soviet Russian schools was the Co-Mission, a joint effort of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the US-based Campus Crusade for Christ. In this program, Campus Crusade created voluntary training sessions on morals and ethics that public school teachers could attend. Campus Crusade also developed curricular tools that teachers could draw upon in developing their moral lessons. From 1992, when the program formally began, to 1997, when it ended, over 1500 missionary educators were involved in the project. Over the long run, however, the long-term goals of Campus Crusade (to win Russian converts to Evangelical Christianity and to plant Protestant churches) and those of the Ministry of Education and Science (to halt Russia’s perceived moral decline) proved to be too different for the program to continue. More importantly, the resurgent Russian Orthodox Church, highly suspicious of Campus Crusade’s Protestant worldview, developed its own program of moral and religious education, the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture*, which it sought to introduce into the schools (Glanzer 2002).

By the time the five-year Co-Mission program ended, the legal landscape in Russia had significantly changed. In September 1997, with the strong support of the Russian Orthodox Church, the State Duma passed a more restrictive law on religion designed to favor the “traditional” faiths of the peoples of Russia. The Russian constitution remained a self-consciously secular document that articulated the principle of equality of all religions before the law: Article 14 states that “the Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religion may be instituted as state-sponsored or mandatory religion. Religious associations shall be separated from the state, and shall be equal before the law” (Butler and Henderson 1998: 7). At the same time, the 1997 legislation suggested that there was, in fact, a hierarchy of religions based on their historical and cultural contribution to the various ethnic groups

that made up the Russian Federation. In this respect, the 1997 law envisions religion as an important part of the social fabric, not simply a matter of private choice that each citizen is free to exercise.

The process of registration was particularly important for putting this hierarchical system into practice. The law divided religious organizations into three categories: (1) unregistered “religious groups” that had no rights of juridical personhood but might seek registration; (2) registered “local religious organizations”; and (3) “centralized religious organizations” that included at least three “local organizations” as members. To enjoy the full benefits of juridical personhood, registered individual congregations had either to have been in existence for fifteen years or to belong to a national “centralized religious organization.” These restrictions clearly favored the handful of religious organizations that had had a legal existence in 1982, including, of course, the four religions specifically enumerated in the 1997 preamble: the Orthodox Church, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.

“Traditional” Religions and the Russian Classroom, 1997–2009

With this major victory in reshaping the Russian religious marketplace, the Russian Orthodox Church sought to extend its influence into public education and found a willing partner among many politicians at the regional and national level. After the passage of the law on religious associations, several regional governments provided financial support for religious education in high schools. These courses were offered under a variety of different names, used different textbooks, and followed diverse programs of study. Belgorod Oblast offered the “Fundamentals and Values of Orthodoxy”; students in Kursk could take the “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture”; schools in the Voronezh and Kaliningrad Oblasts offered the “Law of God” as an elective; and the “Foundation of Orthodox Culture and Morality” was introduced in Novosibirsk and Smolensk (Mitrokhin 2004). At the same time, some ethnic republics introduced the study of the dominant regional religious traditions in their public schools. For example, from 1998, by government decree, schools in Ingushetia taught the “Fundamentals of Religion” — a course on Islamic culture — to students in fifth through eleventh grades for two hours per week (Obshchestvennaia palata 2007).

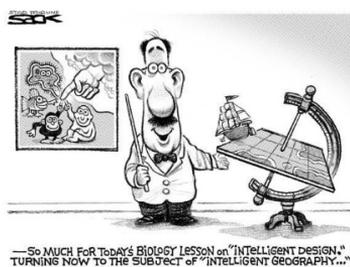
As the largest and most influential religious body, the Orthodox church played the most important role in encouraging the introduction of religious education into the public school system, and in the late 1990s it found a sympathetic ally in the Federal Ministry of Education and Science. Early in

1999, the minister of education, Vladimir Mikhailovich Filippov, called for the creation of a commission designed to free state educational standards, academic programs, textbooks and teaching aids from “manifestations of militant atheism.” In June, he issued instructions explaining how parents could request that their schools offer space to local Orthodox churches for optional courses in religion outside the framework of the educational program (Ministerstvo obrazovaniia 1999). A new Coordinating Council for Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Russian Orthodox Church, created in July 1999, began to develop curricula that could be used in state schools (Metlik 2010; Dneprov 2011). Later that summer, the Ministry of Education and Science signed an agreement with the Moscow Patriarchate to implement joint programs to enhance spirituality in the development of education (Filippov 2001: 11). At the end of the year, Patriarch Alexy II formally urged his diocesan bishops to take full advantage of the provisions in the 1997 law that allowed for the teaching of religion in public schools (Aleksii 1999; Shakhnovich 2014). The church’s efforts bore fruit; by 2002, the Coordinating Council had produced a model curriculum for the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* that included 364 classroom hours and provided lesson plans for every grade in primary and secondary schools. Filippov made this model curriculum available as an option to the regions of the Russian Federation, which increasingly began to introduce courses on Orthodox culture (Vaganov and Filippov 2002; Metlik 2010).

Although presented as an optional program, the model curriculum provoked a storm of controversy. Prominent intellectuals warned that it was a form of religious indoctrination that represented the “clericalization” of Russian society (Mitrokhin 2004). Alla Borodina’s *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture*, the textbook officially approved by the Coordinating Council, was criticized as unscholarly and anti-Semitic, in part because it blamed Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. Lev Ponomarev, a human rights activist, formally requested that the Moscow prosecutor initiate a case against the leaders of the Ministry of Education and Science for inciting national and religious enmity by promoting the work (Ponomarev 2002). In later editions, Borodina revised her textbook and removed some of the most inflammatory material; pedagogical critics still find that her book promotes a naïve faith rather than a scholarly approach to the study of Orthodox culture (Willems 2007; Shnirelman 2012; Iziumskii 2013). Other prominent public figures called for Filippov’s resignation and for new courses on religious tolerance that could be offered as an alternative to the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* (Papkova 2009). Members of religious minorities expressed concern that the new educational policy favored Orthodoxy and threatened the secular nature of the Russian state (Korobov 2007). On the eve of the March

2004 presidential election, President Vladimir Putin fired Filippov (along with other members of his cabinet) and replaced him with Andrei Aleksandrovich Fursenko (Basil 2007). The new minister, who championed a secular course in world religions, approached the issue of religious education cautiously, requesting advice and information from the newly created Civic Chamber (Obshchestvennaia palata 2006; Obshchestvennaia palata 2007).

Debate over the role of religion in education took on a transnational character as secular opponents of the new Orthodox course adapted some of the tactics used against the “intelligent design” curriculum, which “holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection” (Center for Science and Culture n.d.), in US schools. The controversy over intelligent design reached its denouement in the United States in 2005 when a federal judge banned the new curriculum as a violation of the First Amendment (*Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District* 2005). To ridicule the new course on Orthodox culture, Russian secularists adapted Minneapolis *Star Tribune* cartoonist Steve Sack’s 2005 caricature directed against intelligent design. In the original cartoon, the teacher, who stands in front of a creationist poster depicting the hand of God creating different animal species, gestures toward a flat-earth “globe” (complete with a ship falling off the edge of the world) and declares, “So much for the biology lesson on ‘Intelligent Design.’ Turning now to the subject of ‘Intelligent Geography’...” (Sack 2005). Leaving the drawing unchanged, the Russian adapters titled the cartoon “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture: A Great Way to Fuck Up School” and altered the captions to read, “The lesson on Orthodox biology is finished. Let us now turn to the lesson on Orthodox geography” (“Osnovy pravoslavnoi kul’tury” n.d.).



Despite such criticisms, more and more regional authorities began introducing some form of religious education into public schools. The 1992 law on education had provided for both a regional and a school component to each school’s curriculum; 75 percent of curricular hours were determined by

the federal government, 15 percent by the regions, and 10 percent by each school. Until 2009, religious education courses were offered as part of the local (regional or school) component of the curriculum. As a result, courses on religion varied widely throughout the federation, and shared no common plan, philosophy or textbook: in some regions, no religious education was offered in public schools, while in others, it was required. By 2006, at least 15 oblasts had incorporated the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* into the regional component of the curriculum; four of these oblasts (Belgorod, Bryansk, Kaluga, and Smolensk) had made it a required course (Divnogortseva 2011) — although parents who objected could petition to have their children excused (Obshchestvennaia palata 2007). Ingushetia, which included the study of Islam in its regional curricular component, provided an alternative, the *Fundamentals of Ethics*, for those parents who preferred a more secular course. On the other hand, Chechnya, which also required the study of Islam, offered no alternative. In other regions, individual schools included religious education as part of the school component of the curriculum. In December 2006, 11,184 Russian schools in 35 oblasts were offering some form of the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* (Divnogortseva 2011). A survey conducted in 2007 by the Civic Chamber found that the number of students studying religion in public schools was increasing rapidly; from the previous academic year, that number had jumped by at least 15 percent. Only ten federal subjects offered no religious education at all. In the remaining federal subjects, over 500,000 students formally studied Orthodox culture, another 150,000 to 200,000 studied Islam, and 50,000 took courses on the history and philosophy of world religions. Smaller numbers studied Judaism, Buddhism, or the traditional religions of the ethnic groups in Russia's northern regions. Altogether, the Chamber concluded, 700,000 to 800,000 students were taking formal courses in or about religion in Russian public schools during the 2006–2007 academic year (Obshchestvennaia Palata 2007). To ensure parental choice and to improve the quality of the courses offered, the report called for the development and clarification of federal standards. Soon after the report, the Russian Duma began to federalize the curriculum by gradually phasing out the regional component — the vehicle by which religious education had been offered (Papkova 2009). In the summer of 2009, the government announced a new approach to moral education.

The Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics

On July 21, 2009, President Dmitry Medvedev expressed his support for a more comprehensive course in religious culture and secular eth-

ics in the schools (Medvedev et al. 2009). Although the president emphasized the secular nature of the course, which would be taught by trained public school teachers rather than clergy, he announced at the same time the introduction of Orthodox chaplains in the Russian armed forces, a clear victory for the Orthodox Church, which had long sought to establish an official presence in the nation's military. The new educational policy also clearly aimed to please the Church without alienating religious minorities, including the substantial minority of atheists. The curriculum sought to address an ongoing concern about the "the spiritual consolidation of the multi-ethnic people of Russia into one political nation," one of the chief goals of the *Concept of the National Educational Policy of the Russian Federation* adopted by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science in 2006 (Ministerstvo obrazovaniia 2006). To achieve this goal, the ministry drew on the recommendations of a team of experts including Alexander Iaroslavovich Daniliuk, the editor of the scholarly journal *Pedagogika*, Alexander Mikhailovich Kondakov (b. 1958), the head of the Prosveshchenie (Enlightenment) textbook publishing company, and Valery Aleksandrovich Tishkov (b. 1941), the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who authored *The Concept of Spiritual-Moral Development and Education of the Personality of a Citizen of Russia*, published in 2009. The three scholars contend that the traditional religions of Russia are national resources that provide a moral foundation for the nation (Daniliuk, Kondakov and Tishkov 2009; Daniliuk, Kondakov and Tishkov 2009a).

When the new curriculum was introduced, parents were given a choice of six different modules that their grade-school children could study. Parents could decide to have their children study one of the so-called traditional religions of Russia: Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam. If none of these options were satisfactory, parents could also choose to have their children study a course in secular ethics or a survey course in world religions. The program did not and does not provide modules for non-Orthodox Christians. Although several million Russian citizens are Protestants, there is no "Fundamentals of Protestant Culture" offered as an option for Russian parents. Likewise, Russian Catholics, who number approximately one million, and Armenian Apostolic Christians, who number 1.5 million, cannot choose to have their children study their own religious cultures. By contrast, the smaller Buddhist community, which includes only 900,000 members by the most generous estimates, and Jews, who numbered 156,801 in the 2010 census, each have a module devoted to their faiths.

The program was launched experimentally in 19 regions of Russia in the 2009–2010 academic year; two more regions (the Mari Republic and Yaroslavl Oblast) were added in the next year, so that 21 regions participated in the trial, which included 240,000 pupils in over 10,000 schools (Gogin 2012; Romanova 2013). The entire course engages students for one hour per week for 34 weeks. State authorities quickly declared the experiment a success. In February 2012, the deputy minister of education reported that 98 percent of the teachers regarded the new course positively, 81 percent of the pupils wanted to continue their studies, and “more than half of the parents surveyed were certain that the study of this subject had a positive influence on the morals of their children, and nurtured a culture of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional fellowship as well as a relationship of respect for the cultural and religious traditions of the peoples of Russia” (Orlova 2012). Although parents were somewhat less appreciative of the new course than were their children’s teachers, Russian politicians continued to strongly support the new curriculum. In a meeting at the Danilov Monastery with Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev) and other leaders of the “traditional” religions of Russia, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin declared that he had not heard a single negative assessment about the new program, which Russian society as a whole had fully accepted. “We have achieved very good results,” he concluded (“Stenogramma” 2012).

Despite this enthusiasm, other observers noted two serious practical problems (Kozyrev 2012: 73–74). First, providing the full panoply of six options in every school proved difficult. For example, one mother in Koroлев, a town near Moscow, complained that she was simply informed that her child would be enrolled in a course on secular ethics — in clear violation of the rules: “No one asked me whether or not I wanted my child to study this subject. In the general course of things, they had me sign a paper that I was informed that my daughter would study this subject (17 hours in fourth grade and 17 hours in fifth grade) and that I had chosen the module ‘Fundamentals of Secular Ethics.’ And they explained that, because of the lack of teachers, a choice of modules would be possible only in the distant future, so for the time being the school had to choose the most neutral option” (Ziganshina 2011).

Secondly, many teachers complained about a lack of adequate training (Willems 2012). As Fedor Kozyrev, professor at the St. Petersburg Christian Academy of the Humanities, has remarked, the short training courses provided by federal and local experts could not compensate for “the profound lack of religious knowledge in those who graduated from state schools and universities where religion was never taught” (Kozyrev 2012: 74). To help teachers discuss and over-

come difficulties, the Ministry of Education and Science created a web site, <http://www.orkce.org>, where educators can post questions and responses. The resulting dialogue reveals many of their concerns and contradictory conceptions of the course. For example, writing in September 2012, one teacher confessed the fear that possessed her at the beginning of the year as she anticipated teaching the *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* (tatyana_g 2012). Another teacher happily described her experience in designing an educational program on Orthodox culture for her second-graders only to be rebuked for her arrogance by one of her peers: “Respected colleague! To create one’s own program on the Fundamentals of O[rthodox] C[ulture], one must have a theological education at the very least! Aren’t you TERRIFIED to independently explain ORTHODOX CULTURE to children without any worldly experience?” (Irina.Sirotkina237 2013). Against this reproach, a third teacher responded, “This is a course in cultural studies. It is not at all necessary to have theological education, as you claim. I think that our colleague relied on many methodological recommendations when she created her program” (gromadyuk 2013). Sergei Korsun’s 2010 cartoon “The New Teacher” illustrated the anxiety that many teachers felt when they had to represent a variety of religions to their students. Dressed in turban and a suit that sports the symbols of several different religions, a new teacher, smiling nervously, introduces himself to his class.



Beyond these two practical difficulties, the new curriculum faces an even more basic challenge: there seems to be no common or shared understanding of its goals. Is it primarily patriotic education whose purpose is to make children love their Motherland? All of the modules emphasize the remarkable nature of the Russian Federation and the patriotism it should inspire. For others, the *Fundamentals* are primarily a means of moral education supported by traditional religious values; the main goal

of the new curriculum is to create decent human beings and citizens who will fulfill their civic obligations and live in peace with one another. Still others see the *Fundamentals* as a way to promote religion, and especially Russian Orthodoxy. For example, Governor of Belgorod Oblast Evgenii Savchenko believes that children of his oblast should be brought into the Church and that half of the lessons in the required course should take place in churches or on missionary field trips (Gogin 2012). When he first announced the course in 2009, President Medvedev argued for a purely secular, cultural studies approach to the *Fundamentals*, which should be taught by regular teachers: “The choice of the pupils and their parents, of course, must be absolutely voluntary — this is a very important matter. Any coercion on this question is not only illegal but absolutely counter-productive. Secular pedagogues will teach these subjects” (Medvedev et al. 2009). In his response, Patriarch Kirill agreed: “I think that is important and correct that secular pedagogues, the secular school, should teach these disciplines — this is the principle of the separation of the church from the state” (Medvedev et al. 2009). At the same time, the patriarch characterized the program as a compromise, and the church continues to lobby for greater influence over the approval of teachers, textbooks and methodologies — with some significant successes. For example, in a meeting with religious leaders in 2012, Medvedev’s prime minister, Vladimir Putin, insisted that theologians and priests should teach the *Fundamentals*: “It is important that this subject in the future does not turn into a formality, and so to teach such disciplines we must have well-prepared people — either theologians or priests” (“Stenogramma” 2012).

During the two-year trial, most parents preferred the course in secular ethics rather than one of the four modules designed to teach a “traditional” religion of Russia. In the first year, about two-thirds of all pupils in the 19 regions chose one of the secular options: secular ethics (47 percent) or world religions (20 percent). Almost a quarter of all students opted to study Orthodox culture. In the second year, with 21 regions participating, the popularity of secular ethics declined slightly to 42 percent, while 40 percent of parents selected one of the religious options. Three out of ten pupils chose Orthodox culture, and 9 percent studied Islam (Nikitin 2011).

The trial also demonstrated wide variations among regions (Table 1). In both years of the experiment, almost all of the pupils in Chechnya opted to study Islamic culture. Likewise, in the traditionally Muslim Karachai-Cherkess Republic, large proportions of parents selected Islamic culture for their children in both 2009–10 (39 percent) and 2010–11 (25 percent). In Kalmykia, the home of the Sajin Lama where

Buddhist institutions had been completely repressed for fifty years under the Soviets, significant numbers of pupils studied Buddhist culture. On the other hand, parents in Siberia tended to select more secular options. For example, in the first year of the trial in Tomsk Oblast, out of 9,140 pupils, most had chosen the world religions or the secular ethics course rather than the explicitly religious options (Table 2; Shitikova 2010). In the following year, nearly 80 percent of parents in the Tomsk region had selected one of the two more secular choices (Table 3).

When the program expanded to the entire nation, secular ethics, Orthodox culture, and world religions again proved to be the most popular choices. In September 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science reported that a plurality, 42.7 percent, of parents throughout Russia, had chosen the course in secular ethics for their fourth-graders (Table 4). St. Petersburg proved to be especially secular; most parents chose the module in secular ethics, and only 9 percent elected to have their children study the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* (Table 5). The course in secular ethics was also the overwhelming choice of parents in the Southern (74 percent), Ural (73 percent), and Northwestern (62 percent) Federal Districts (Orlova 2012). Some parents objected to a course on religion in school. A mother in Omsk declared that “religious education is a family affair,” and another said, “I don’t want my family’s religion to become public property” (Iakovleva 2012).

Statistics from the ethnic republics often — but not always — reflected the religious heritage of their citizens. For example, in the predominantly Muslim republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia, nearly all parents in 2012 selected the course in the *Fundamentals of Islamic Culture*. Likewise, 70 percent of the parents in Tuva chose to have their children study the *Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture* (“Religioznye kul’tury” 2012). On the other hand, in 2012 all of the parents in the Republic of Tatarstan, a traditionally Muslim region, chose either the course in secular ethics (61.3 percent) or world religious cultures (38.7 percent) (Orlova 2012).

Some parents, however, have complained that they had no choice; the school administration provided them a single option. The practical difficulties of providing six different modules in moral education has proven too much for many elementary schools throughout Russia. In Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, the regional chief of elementary education, Viktor Nikolaevich Shmelev, admitted that many school principals “found it much easier to offer a single module than two, three, or all six” (Makhlina 2014). Parents are often simply told which module their child will study (Plys 2013). In Miassa, Chelyabinsk Oblast, a group of parents sued their school for forcing their children to take the course in the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* (Orlova 2013,

April 6). In other cases, schools have insisted that parents choose the course in secular ethics (Ziganshina 2011). One Orthodox priest in Rostov-on-Don expressed his frustration that parents were often not allowed to choose the Orthodox course: “According to the law, the parents should choose what their children will study. But that’s according to the law. In most Russian schools, this question is decided by the school administration, and no one bothers to ask the parents. As a result, beginning in September, most schools will probably teach only secular ethics” (Matsan 2012). The Orthodox clergy has been especially troubled by the relatively low numbers of parents choosing to have their children study Orthodox culture (Moshkin 2013). Patriarch Kirill himself has objected to the lack of choice afforded to parents (Chinkova 2013). Metropolitan Merkurii (Ivanov) of Rostov and Novocherkassk, the head of the department of religious education and catechization, has expressed his incredulity at the low percentage of pupils studying Orthodox culture (Orlova 2013, March 20: 3). In an effort to ensure that parents have the opportunity to choose the *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture* for their children, priests are seeking to address the parent-school meetings where the decisions are made. In addition, some churches advertise for the course and encourage parents to report those cases in which school officials refuse to allow them to choose the Orthodox module (Khrum Zhivonachal’noi Troitsy v Chertanove 2014). In an effort to address these concerns, the new law on education, adopted in 2012, affirmed parents’ right to choose the module that their children will study (Russian Federation 2012).

The successful implementation of the new course has not ended the debate over the nature of religious education in the public school system. Some strict secularists attack the new program as a form of religious indoctrination that violates the constitution (Ozhiganova 2014). Other secular scholars defend the program, arguing that knowledge of religion and religious practices can help children to develop empathy and respect for others in a pluralistic society (Murav’ev and Shakhnovich 2012; Shakhnovich 2014). By contrast, for some Orthodox educators, especially those in St. Tikhon’s University, this limited program does not go far enough; for the moral regeneration of the nation, substantial state investment in an Orthodox educational system is needed (Metlik 2010).

Conclusion

The *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* represent an important rejection of the strictly secular beginnings of the independ-

ent Russian republic and a move toward a prerevolutionary model in which the state cooperated with certain favored religious organizations to achieve important social goals. Although the 1993 constitution contains a strong affirmation of secularism and the equality of all religions before the law, Russian politicians have gradually adopted a policy that recognizes Russia's religious diversity but seeks to strengthen "traditional" religions. The 1997 law on religious associations in its preamble expressly favored those religions that had a historic role in shaping the cultures of the peoples of Russia, but did not provide a definitive list; the law recognizes the contributions of non-Orthodox Christianity and of unspecified "other religions" that had been important for Russia. Later policy-makers, however, limited the number of traditional religions to the four specifically mentioned in the 1997 law: Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Likewise, the 2012 law on education abandoned the strictly secular approach of the legislators who had crafted Russian educational policy twenty years earlier. Incorporating spiritual education into the national curricular standards, the new law offers centralized religious organizations the possibility of reviewing textbooks and methodologies (Article 87). State policy now encourages active engagement with "traditional" religions, which are regarded as valuable resources for the development of moral, patriotic citizens.

As evidence of this shift, important Russian leaders have vigorously rejected strict secularism as a state policy. In December 2007, when an interviewer from *Time* magazine pointed out that Russia is a secular state — affirmed by Article 14 of the Russian constitution — Putin interrupted, "No, no, that's not true. In our law, it is written that we have four traditional religions, four. Our American partners criticize us for this, but that's what our legislators have decided. These four traditional Russian religions are Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism" (Putin 2007). Similarly, in response to a resolution by the US House of Representatives criticizing Russia for its alleged lack of religious liberty, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs eloquently expressed its rejection of the American church-state model: "The American model of legal regulation of these problems [religious liberty and freedom of conscience] is very exotic, as it is based on the declaration of absolute formal equality among all religions and their practical elimination from public affairs. Such a legal model is not used anywhere in the world but the U.S." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). Even though the Russian constitution affirms the equality of all religions before the law — and the US constitution does not — the ministry chose to present this principle as an exotic American peculiarity. For Russian policy makers, the *Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics* provide a more fruitful alternative

to strict church-state separation. The new course is part of a broader state strategy to partner with religious communities (especially the Russian Orthodox Church) to accomplish mutually beneficial goals, such as the socialization of children. This partnership necessarily stretches the constitutional definition of Russia as a secular state, but clearly the current Russian leadership believes that the benefits of this alliance outweigh its potential costs.

Nevertheless, the *Fundamentals* have proven to be controversial, with some critics decrying the new curriculum as a form of obscurantism and others blaming the new course for not going far enough in introducing religion in the classroom. By making religion a central part of children's moral education, Russian educators are seeking to transform the "social imaginary" that has excluded or restricted religion's participation in the public sphere. In Charles Taylor's evocative phrase, the modern social imaginary of the West has meant "the freeing of politics from its ontic dependence on religion" and "the end of a certain kind of religion or the divine in public space" (Taylor 2004: 187). But Taylor goes on to argue that the Western social imaginary is but one of "multiple modernities," and the Russian politicians and educators who are implementing the new curriculum see a modernity in which religion is a vital partner with the state in the formation of moral citizens. The confused and somewhat contradictory goals of the course bode ill for its success. Does it seek primarily to teach children about religion as a cultural phenomenon? Or is it designed primarily to instill moral values with the help of religion? Or is it simply a means of promoting religion? The Ministry of Education and Science continues to develop this experiment, which will probably continue to undergo reforms as Russians decide whether and how they want their religions taught in the classroom, leaving behind the strict secularism of their constitution's framers.

Table 1
Parental preferences for moral education modules by region (percentages), 2009-11

Region	2009-10		2010-11		2009-10		2010-11		2009-10		2010-11		2009-10		2010-11		
	Secular	Secular	World	World	Orthodox	Orthodox	Islam	Islam	Buddhist	Buddhist	Jewish	Jewish	Buddhist	Buddhist	Jewish	Jewish	
Chechnya	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chuvashiya	24	37	43	26	31	36	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish Autonomous Oblast	12	21	24	31	61	47	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
Kaliningrad	61	61	4	8	35	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kalmykiya	31	18	37	24	5	15	1	0	27	43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kamchatka	55	50	13	17	32	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karachay-Cherkess Republic	23	26	20	45	18	4	39	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Krasnoyarsk	58	63	22	24	19	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kurgan	60	63	18	17	21	19	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mari-El		36		20		43		2									
Novosibirsk	66	72	16	16	19	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Penza	62	22	38	18	0	57	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stavropol	23	24	6	12	69	60	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sverdlovsk	55	54	23	26	21	19	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tambov	37	13	7	3	55	84	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tomsk	52	49	26	30	18	20	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tver	13	19	17	8	69	73	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Udmurtiya	54	48	29	35	16	16	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vologda	58	57	17	12	25	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yaroslavl		40		17		43		0									

Sources: Nikitin 2011; Promezhutochnye rezultaty 2011. Data for Kostroma, one of the regions in the trial, is not complete and therefore not included here.

Table 2
Parental preferences for moral education modules
Tomsk 2010, n=9140

Subject	Percentage of pupils
Secular Ethics	51.4%
Orthodox Culture	24.0%
World Religious Cultures	22.4%
Islamic Culture	0.83%
Buddhist Culture	0.61%
Jewish Culture	0.95%

Source: (Shitikova 2010)

Table 3
Parental preferences for moral education modules
Tomsk 2011, n=9352

Subject	Percentage of pupils	
Secular Ethics	4605	49.24%
World Religious Cultures	2821	30.16%
Orthodox Culture	1871	20.01%
Islamic Culture	49	0.52%
Buddhist Culture	4	0.04%
Jewish Culture	7	0.07%

Source: (Vybor modulia 2011)

Table 4
Parental preferences for moral education modules
in the Russian Federation, September 2012

Subject	Number of pupils	Percentage
Secular Ethics	557 507	42.7
Orthodox Culture	428 955	31.7
World Religious Cultures	286 050	21.2
Islamic Culture	54 275	4.0
Buddhist Culture	4 996	0.4
Jewish Culture	690	0.1

Sources: (“Shkol’niki RF” 2012) (“Religioznye kul’tury 2012)

Table 5
Parental preferences for moral education modules
in Moscow and St. Peterburg, September 2012

Subject	Moscow	Peterburg
Fundamentals of Secular Ethics	27%	52.61%
Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture	47%	9%
Fundamentals of World Religious Cultures	23%	37.74%

Source: (“Religioznye kul’tury” 2012)

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