



Psychological Conditions for the Acceptance of Religious Education by a New Generation of Russians

Tatiana N. Knyazeva^{1*}, Lidiya E. Semenova², Anna V. Chevachina³, Marina B. Batyuta⁴,
Elena V. Sidorina⁵

¹Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University Named After K. Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, ²Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University Named After K. Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, ³Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University Named After K. Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, ⁴Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University Named After K. Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, ⁵Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University Named After K. Minin, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia.

*Email: tnknyazeva@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

The relevance of the problems stated in the article is determined by fundamental changes in the entire Russian society, which affected its foundations and traditional values. Amidst weakening of regulative influence of religion over various aspects of social life in the late twentieth century, the level of religiosity of the citizens, including youth, significantly increased. In this connection, this article aims to identify the nature of religiosity of Russian youth and the specifics of relationship of religiosity with pragmatic life goals. The leading method to study this problem is problem-oriented interviews, allowing to reveal the attitude of modern Russian youth towards religion under the conditions of new social realities. The article reveals that among the Russian youth there is a predominance of those who do not consider themselves to be true believers, who express doubts about the existence of true believers, who demonstrate some skepticism as regards religiosity of their contemporaries and explain the appeal towards religion by ignorance, fashion and human influence of significant others. At the same time, along with their peers, claiming to be true believers, they tend to view religion as a means of consolation and support, attributing to it the function of protection and not that of moral perfection and spiritual renewal. The article also provides the facts, manifesting the presence among true youth believers of egoistic religious motivation and relationship to God from the standpoint of personal well-being, which suggests its pseudo-religiosity. Materials of the article are of practical value for the use of this information for educational purposes and in educational courses with religious content.

Keywords: Religion, Faith, Religiosity, Education, Religious Content, Student Youth

JEL Classifications: A23, I23, I26

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, the attitude towards religion, Church and believers in Russia was not univocal. However, the dynamics of processes of socio-historical and socio-political nature in recent years have contributed to the change in this situation, by making religion the most important social phenomenon of the modern Russian society. Presently, there are wide discussions of issues of religious education, religious upbringing and promotion of religious values in various social institutions (schools, universities, army, media, medical establishments, crisis centers, etc.).

As it is known, the essential attribute of religion is faith. In psychological research, this phenomenon has been attributed a special place (Granovskaya, 2004; Dvoynin, 2005; Zenko, 2009). Without going into a detailed analysis of various aspects of faith psychology, we will note the most significant issues in the context of our study.

The psychological phenomenon of belief, defined as the inner attitude of a man to the world in which the construction of subjective reality takes place (Dvoynin, 2005), is a selective and active-effective component of consciousness in general and of religious consciousness in particular. The selectivity of faith

(in religious context) is tied up with the significance of some religious teachings in comparison with others. Active-effective nature of faith is a motivator for the construction of a particular subjective reality and an incentive to action in accordance with it. Thus, the effectiveness of faith is logically determined by the degree of influence of religious ideas, rules, values, attributes, etc. accepted by a human being, on his behaviour and activities, which is characterized by the concept of “religiosity.”

However, it is possible that religiosity may be supplanted by the concept of “pseudo religiosity” (“external religiosity”). Therefore quite natural is the question about the extent of real acceptance of religious values by a person (Knyazeva et al., 2015). A number of studies have found out that “claiming to be Orthodox, many respondents refer primarily to their origin from the relevant ethno-cultural environment and identify themselves not so much with the Orthodox Church as with Orthodox cultural tradition. This consideration does not automatically classify them as believers” (Matvienko, 2014). Therefore, not every piece of information of religious nature may be positively looked at by a subject.

New format of appeal to religion in modern Russia led to spreading in various educational institutions of special courses with religious content. While In primary and secondary schools these courses are mainly informative and educational, in special and higher education institutions, they have value-semantic orientation. However, many young students have already formed the basis of the worldview that may already contain established attitude towards religion, positive or negative in nature. Therefore, popularization and introduction of courses with religious content may produce the effect of rejection of faith and religious values (Grosheva, 2011; Lebedev, 2004; Englert, 2002; Lohrer, 2012).

Psychological studies (Andreeva, 2010; Golov, 2008; Klinetskaya, 2009; Lebedev, 2007; Matvienko, 2014; Popov, 2008) have shown that for accepting this or that information the person should have inner readiness for it. Readiness of this kind includes motivation for perception of information, availability of primary awareness about the subject matter, the intersection of life experience of the person with substantive aspects of information. In addition, one must take into consideration the “effect of novelty” of the presented information and personal interest of the subject in it. Thus, before the introduction of courses with religious content into educational process, it is necessary to determine the extent of readiness of the audience to the adoption of this content.

The effectiveness of promotion and conduction of courses with religious content depends on demand for them. This kind of research in Russian psychology is undertaken occasionally and does not yet have wide coverage in scientific periodicals (Lebedev, 2007). We have made an attempt to analyze the nature of the relationship to faith and religion among students. These data are necessary to understand the factors that determine the efficiency of introducing courses with religious content into educational system and their positive perception by students.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this publication, the authors present the analysis of comparative empirical research, allowing to determine students’ subjective attitude towards religion as a factor in their acceptance of religious knowledge.

Our study involved young subjects - students of higher and secondary specialized educational institutions of Nizhny Novgorod numbering 106 people aged 18-22 years.

As a main method of research, we used the problem-oriented interview, including the following questions:

- Do you consider yourself a true believer?
- Have you appealed to God? In what situations?
- Why does a modern man need religion?
- Under what conditions in the learning process a course with religious content will be in demand?

Interview data processing was made using open coding procedure, implying the distribution of all responses into meaningful categories. Selection of semantic categories was carried out by the expert group of 4 people.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first stage of the analysis was the distribution of all subjects into two groups - calling themselves the true believers (Group 1) and those not referring themselves to true believer (Group 2) - according to their answers to the question “Do you consider yourself a true believer?”

Group 1 consisted of 31 people (29% of the total number of study participants); Group 2 comprised 75 people (71% of subjects).

Despite the fact that only a small part of our respondents identified themselves as true believers, the subjects in both groups reported that they appealed to God a number of times, namely, 82.3% of girls (51) and 77.3% of boys (34). Among them, there were all our subjects of Group 1 and 72% of subjects of Group 2.

Overall, according to our survey participants, their appealing to God happened in the following circumstances (Table 1).

As can be seen from Table 1, no significant differences in the reported circumstances for personal appealing to God in the subjects of Groups 1 and 2 are observed. All of them almost equally mention the difficulties of life and situations that cause a feeling of hopelessness, and more often than not speak about help to themselves than others. This concurrence of responses between respondents who identify themselves as true believers and those who do not consider themselves as such, allows us to view these factors as the most important for students. It cannot be ruled out that the latter fact can be important to the contents of courses on religious topics, where special emphasis should be placed on the importance of religion as one of the resources of psychological support for the personality.

To this end, it should be noted that such circumstances for appealing to God as requests for assistance, refer, to a greater extent, to requests for help for the very self and much less for help to the dear ones, i.e., even among the students' true believers dominant motivation is selfish, consonant with considerations for personal gains. That is why religious courses introduced into educational practice of the growing generation should by all means incorporate the task of changing the orientation of young people's religious motivation from selfish and pragmatic one to that of altruistic, spiritual, moral, so as to ensure the personality growth of young men by raising their attentive and caring attitude towards the loved ones.

No less important is the fact that among the circumstances for personal turning to God and religion by students, matters of cognitive plan take the last place, that is, cognitive needs are to a lesser extent connected by young generation with religion's ability to give answers to vital questions. Most likely this is due to the fact that to get answers to their queries, young people turn to the Internet community or Internet sources, in which religious and educational organizations may popularize their ideas.

The views of the respondents on the conditions and situations in which other people usually turn to God and religion, as presented in Table 2.

Judging by the students' responses, the predominant motif in both groups of subjects is the focus on life's difficulties and human sense of despair, when only God remains the last hope: "I think that

people usually turn to God when in trouble, when they tried out all available methods and those didn't help. Then comes despair, and people go to Church, ask God for help" (Group 1); "God is the last hope of the doomed" (Group 2); "God for many is helper and protector. Moreover, people need such support. Especially those who believe in it" (Group 1). "God is the last resort for those utterly desperate and their hope for the best" (Group 2).

At the same time, much rarer were mentions of happy moments in life as motivators for appeals to God, of the feeling of gratitude to Him and of religious holidays and traditions. Table 2 also demonstrates that such arguments for appealing to God as solidarity with other significant people and attempts of blaming God were mentioned only by respondents who do not consider themselves true believers.

We shall illustrate the latest opinions by giving specific examples of statement of subjects from Group 2.

"There are such people for whom there is no difference between going shopping and going to the Church to pray. The main thing is to be in company. To keep up with others;" "Many a time did I watch people first pray, and then get drunk and use foul language;" "It is something like sort of conformism, I would say. The desire not to be black sheep. Demonstration of belonging and loyalty to those who, for whatever reasons, are important"; "It happens that someone even blames God for not helping, for not meeting his requests."

Thus, it turns out that for modern students mainly those aspects of religion that are associated with their personal problems are mostly in demand. From the point of view of teaching courses with religious content, it means that they should reflect the link between personal requirements and matters of faith. Perhaps, when introducing such type of courses, it would be worth noting that certain aspects of religious influence are similar to the mechanisms of psychological support to a person.

The respondents' answers to the last question of the interview concerning the conditions for relevance of courses with religious content, are reflected in Table 3.

As per assumptions of our subjects, among the conditions under which courses with religious content may be relevant, are the following: Primarily, search for purpose of life, presence of life difficulties, need for protection and help. Moreover, such was the opinion of respondents of both groups.

However, for subjects who define themselves as true believers, a person's sincere belief in God was a specifically significant condition, whereas respondents who do not refer themselves to true believers, named, among conditions for starting up courses with religious content, fashion for religion and everything associated with it, including religious knowledge, rites and attributes, search for more support in life and desire of a man to repent in that way. Besides, particularly the subjects of the latter group singled out such conditions as aspiration to become a believer, and human ignorance, which did not emerge in the responses of true believers.

Table 1: Circumstances for personal appealing to God by Russian youth

Subjects categories	Group 1		Group 2		Final rank
	Number (%)	Rank	Number (%)	Rank	
Life difficulties	17 (43.6)	1	29 (43.9)	1	1
Hopelessness	8 (20.5)	2	11 (16.7)	2.5	2
Appeal for help to oneself	6 (15.3)	3	11 (16.7)	2.5	3
Gratitude	5 (12.8)	4	9 (13.6)	4	4
Appeal for help to dear ones	2 (5.2)	5	5 (7.6)	5	5
Questions	1 (2.6)	6	1 (1.5)	6	6

Table 2: Human motives for turning to God and religion

Subjects categories	Group 1		Group 2		Final rank
	Number (%)	Rank	Number (%)	Rank	
Life difficulties	26 (34.2)	1	41 (28.7)	2	1
Hopelessness the last hope only in God	21 (27.6)	2	47 (32.9)	1	2
Pleadings for help and protection	18 (23.7)	3	33 (23.0)	3	3
Joy experiences. happy life moments	6 (7.9)	4	5 (3.5)	5	4
Religious holidays and traditions	1 (1.3)	6	9 (6.3)	4	5
Feelings of gratitude	4 (5.3)	5	3 (2.1)	7	6
Solidarity with others	-	7.5	4 (2.8)	6	7
Blaming God	-	7.5	1 (0.7)	8	8

Table 3: Attribution of conditions for relevance of courses with religious content

Subjects categories	Group 1		Group 2		Final rank
	Number (%)	Rank	Number (%)	Rank	
Search for purpose of life	27 (23.7)	1	22 (13.7)	1.5	1
Presence of life difficulties	26 (22.8)	2	22 (13.7)	1.5	2
Need for protection. help	18 (15.8)	3	19 (11.8)	3	3
Sincere faith in God	11 (9.6)	4	8 (5.0)	8	4
Disappointment in life	7 (6.1)	5	11 (6.8)	6	5
Search for additional support	4 (3.5)	6.5	13 (8.1)	4.5	6.5
Desire to repent	4 (3.5)	6.5	13 (8.1)	4.5	6.5
Fashion for religion	2 (1.8)	11	9 (5.6)	7	8
Presence of fear	3 (2.6)	9	7 (4.4)	10	9
Search for harmony in oneself	2 (1.8)	11	7 (4.4)	10	10.5
Search for social identity	2 (1.8)	11	7 (4.4)	10	10.5
Loneliness	1 (0.9)	12.5	6 (3.6)	12.5	12
Desire to become a believer	-	14.5	6 (3.6)	12.5	13
Necessary part of education	3 (2.6)	9	3 (1.9)	15	14
Search for answers	3 (2.6)	9	2 (1.2)	16.5	15
Human ignorance	-	14.5	4 (2.5)	14	16
Attempt to explain the inexplicable	1 (0.9)	12.5	2 (1.2)	16.5	17

Let us quote most typical answers as examples confirming the above stated opinions of Group 1 and Group 2 subjects.

“True believers honoring God will be happy about the introduction of such courses and will, by all means, attend them. For them, they are really useful and interesting” (Group 1); “To be a believer today has become fashionable. It is fashionable to go to Church, to read and quote the Bible. Nevertheless, that does not mean anything. Same fashion can bring a man to special religious courses as well” (Group 2); “Such courses may be of interest to a person of poor education, not well familiar with scientific facts, because it’s silly to believe in something that cannot be proved” (Group 2).

At the same time, we cannot but mention some convergence of views of both groups’ subjects regarding conditions under which educational religious courses can be relevant. In particular, on the one hand, it relates to comparable degree of significance of such a personality factor as disappointment of a man in life, and, as a consequence, his conversion to religion and religious knowledge. A similar opinion was met quite often, as evidenced by the 5th and 6th ranks of this factor in Groups 1 and 2 readings, respectively. On the other hand, it is quite demonstrative that not only those students who do not profess to be true believers, but even true believing youths have rarely identified religious knowledge as a necessary component of the education of a modern man, as evidenced by the 14th rank of this factor from among 17 possible. Of course, this fact cannot be ignored in the introduction of religious courses into the system of Russian education (especially higher education).

Thus, the data obtained in the study suggests that the range of conditions for the demand for courses with religious content is wide enough. However, when developing such courses, one has to take into account that they primarily may be in demand among young people, who need support, got entangled in difficult life situation and among those who are in search of the purpose of life. At the same time, as alternative educational disciplines, courses of psychological education and psychological assistance can be suggested and arranged.

4. CONCLUSION

The data obtained allow concluding of the following:

Today’s pupils and students in their majority are not positioning themselves as true believers. Nevertheless, quite a number of students do not deny the facts of their appealing to God in situations of life difficulties and despair. Therefore, it is possible to speak of situational relevance of faith among the young generation of Russians.

Contemporary Russian youths view solving various life problems, sometimes with distinct selfish interests, as the main motivators for turning to God. God and faith in Him is considered by the majority of young people in the context of personal well-being. This imposes certain requirements to be met when compiling program content for religion-oriented courses, with a lot of emphasis to be placed on the importance of altruistic motivations of true believers.

When comparing personal motivators of interviewed subjects for turning towards religion and their deliberations about the relevance of religion for other people, it becomes apparent that there is a narrower semantic field of personal motivators with an emphasis on life difficulties, and a wider range of perceptions about the needs of other people for turning to God, among which stand out unselfish intentions and appeals pertaining to positive events, namely: A sense of gratitude, joy experiences and happy life moments. It means that in case of other people students have more divergent views about the relationship of man and God, than about their own relationship with Him.

As the main conditions of demand for educational courses with religious content, students name search for purpose of life, life difficulties faced by a person, need for protection and help, which may partly be provided by introduction to religious knowledge and religious values. However, at the same time, regardless of considering themselves as true believers or non-believers, the majority of young people does not look at religious courses as a

necessary component of modern man's education, and thus at the awareness in the religious sphere as an important indicator of his personality development.

It is important that the data obtained in the study is taken into consideration when promoting courses of religious orientation in the Russian educational system. This should be carried out unobtrusively, with respect for the opinions of non-believing people; moreover, when popularizing such information the factor of preparedness of the subject to its perception has to be accounted for.

REFERENCES

- Andreeva, L.A. (2010), Religiosity of Russian youth in higher education institutions in the context of religiosity of Russians. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Freedom of Religion and Democracy: Old and New Challenges". Kiev. Available from: <http://www.religiopolis.org/documents/840-la-andreeva-religioznost-molodezhi-rossijskih-vysshih-uchebnyh-zavedenij-v-kontekste-religioznosti-rossijan-materialy-mezhdunarodnoj-nauchnoj-konferentsii-svoboda-religii-i-demokratii-starye-i-novye-vyzovy-kiev-avg>.
- Dvoynin, A. (2005), Psychological investigation of the phenomenon of faith. *Development of Personality*, 2, 96-111.
- Englert, R. (2002), Ziele religionspädagogischen handels. In: Bitter, G., Englert, R., Miller, G., Nipkow, K.E., editors. *Neues Handbuch Religion Spädagogischer Grundbegriffe*. München: Kösel Verlag. p53-58.
- Golov, A.A. (2008), Religiosity, and what people find in religion. Levada-Center. Available from: <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008031104.html>.
- Granovskaya, R.M. (2004). *The Psychology of Faith*. St. Petersburg: SPb.: It. p576.
- Grosheva, L.I. (2011), The formation of religious education in Russia: Problems and contradictions. *Religions of Russia; Problems of Social Service. The Conference Proceedings*. Moscow, N. Novgorod: Publishing House Medina. p125-129.
- Klinetskaya, N.V. (2009), Religion and youth in the regions of Russia. *Sociological Studies*, 8, 70-77.
- Knyazeva, T.N., Semenova, L.E., Chevachina, A.V. (2015), Social pragmatism and religiosity of contemporary Russian youth. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, 135-140.
- Lebedev, S.D. (2004), On the interaction of secular and religious education in Russian. *Religion and Law*, 2, 40-57.
- Lebedev, S.D. (2007), Attitude of students towards religion. *Sociological Studies*, 7, 87-97.
- Lohrer, J. (2012), Call for Papers: Tagung - Religion Slehrerbildung in der Krise? RPI Virtuel. 28.02. Available from: <http://www.info.blogs.rpi-virtuell.net/2012/02/28/callforpapersreligionslehrerbildungtagunginderkrise>.
- Matvienko, V.A. (2014), Constructing religious identity in the context of social activity of the Russian orthodox church in contemporary Russia. Proceedings of the VI International Scientific-Practical Conference Social Ontology in the Structures of Theoretical Knowledge. Izhevsk: Publishing house of Udmurt University. p327-334.
- Popov, N.P. (2008), How pious we are. *The World of Measurements*, 5, 54-61.
- Zenko, Y.M. (2009), *The Psychology of Faith*. 2nd ed. Saint Petersburg: Piter. p552.