

## TEACHING RELIGION AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES IN RUSSIAN GYMNASIUMS IN THE MIDDLE OF XIX – BEGINNING OF THE XX CENTURY: SEARCHING FOR A HARMONIC CORRELATION

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The article deals with the situation formed during the period of reforming the secondary education system in the Russian Empire (mid XIX – beginning of the XX century), concerning studying the bases of religion in secular secondary schools, as well as position and significance of classical languages (Ancient Greek and Latin) in teaching Russian gymnasium students. Both of them were subject to pedagogic and public discussions throughout the mentioned period, and still they remain debatable nowadays. Based on the information available in the sources and literature on the Russian secondary school history, the main contradictions of two components (“religious” and “antique”) are revealed in the context of a paradigm of classic school education, and also under conditions of isolation of various types of secondary professional schools (“real” gymnasiums and colleges) from classic gymnasiums in the second half of the XIX century. The authors propound conclusions on the reasons behind the contradictions in this particular field and characterize the points of view of the researchers of the problem. Materials of the article are useful for researchers of history of education, philologists, theologians, practicing teachers, and also for participants of modern public and pedagogical discussions concerning educational policy and forming of a new school paradigm.

**Keywords:** history of education, Russian secondary school, educational reforms, teaching of religion, classical languages.

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching the bases of religious studies (lessons of “Zakon Bozhiy”) and classical languages (Ancient Greek and Latin) was an integral part of secondary education in Russian schools till 1917 (Yermoshin, Nikolaeva, 2016). In legislative documents that regulated the system of national education these subjects were declared the basis of Russian school. However, practically this postulate often was a subject to criticism from different public representatives advocating for the separation of school from Church as well as for weakening of the role of classical languages in favor of teaching natural and mathematical sciences, foreign languages and other disciplines. Representatives of a revolutionary sector supporting radical changes of social and political system in Russia criticized this education system most actively (Yermoshin, 2012). It caused corresponding reaction from the ruling classes

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protecting presence of religion and classical languages in the schools of general education. Thereof, it introduces an idea (that was particularly supported by historians of the Soviet period) that “Zakon Bozhiy” and classical languages are the main components of reactionary policy of autocracy in the sphere of national education, they have strong correlation between themselves and that they are direct associates in youth education in a classic gymnasium. However, this statement should be proved by the analysis of actual content of educational process at secondary schools during the period of educational reforms in the second half of XIX – the beginning of the XX centuries, which were reflected in the sources and research works on education history of the Russian Empire. In particular, there can be observed the references to a conflict between “religious” and “antique” components of a unified educational paradigm, the insuperable contradictions between them and at the same time on a possible “conciliation” and cooperation in educational process. These materials are put as a basis for this research that is performed by means of special historical methodological tools.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is known that studying of fundamentals of religion in secondary educational institutions (gymnasiums) was finally legitimized within the educational reform of 1828, when a 7-year course, independent of the course of the primary schools, was established in Russian gymnasiums. The Charter of 1828 particularly proclaimed “Zakon Bozhiy” to be a basis of secondary education alongside with studying mathematics and classical languages (Ancient Greek and Latin); though, as compared with the last ones, the course of religion took a rather modest place in a quantitative sense. But in the middle of the XIX century there began the process of revision of an established correlation, caused by the adjustments of 1828 Charter that were generated by the government of Nikolai I in 1849 and 1852; and under the reign of Alexander II this certain issue was brought up even twice in connection with the gymnasium reforms of 1864 and 1871 that initiated new Charters. The dynamics of the correlation of the subjects can be seen in the table provided below, where the weekly amount of lessons in all classes of a gymnasium is specified, and percentage figures show specific weight of a certain subject in relation to a general academic loading.

TABLE 1: CORRELATION OF LESSONS OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGES AND FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION IN CURRICULUM OF RUSSIAN GYMNASIUMS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Classical languages</i>		<i>“Zakon Bozhiy”</i>	
1828	69 lessons	35%	16 lessons	8,2%
1849	30 lessons	21%	15 lessons	10%
1852	51 lessons	38%	13 lessons	10%
1864	58 lessons	31%	14 lessons	9,2%
1872	86 lessons	47%	13 lessons	7,1%
1890	75 lessons	33,3%	16 lessons	7,1%

The gymnasium Charter of 1864 fixed teaching of fundamentals of religion to the extent of two lessons a week in each of seven classes. This amount of lessons was ordered for classic gymnasiums with two classical languages (Ancient Greek and Latin), for gymnasiums with one classical language (Latin) and for “real” gymnasiums where studying of classical languages was not provided (Charter of 1864: 32-34). Subsequently, the correlation of fundamentals of religion and classical languages in gymnasiums had changed in connection with a new gymnasium Charter of 1871 and the curriculums specifying it, that were approved by the Ministry of national education in 1872 and 1890 (these changes are also reflected in the table).

Thus, historical and statistical research methods let us designate the dynamics of a ratio of classical languages and fundamentals of religion in a general course of secondary educational institutions, as well as to analyze the reasons of these changes (increasing or reducing amount of teaching of the considered subjects), entering them under the guidance of the historicity principle into a general context of socio-political realities of the Russian Empire within the considered period.

## **RESULTS**

As it can be observed in the table provided in a previous section, during the reign of Nikolai I an attempt to enhance studying of religion in gymnasiums due by reducing hours on classical languages was made. What was it connected with? Researchers reasonably suggest that it was a reaction on a wave of European revolutions in 1848: classical education at secondary school was proclaimed as harmful and leading students to “atheism, materialism, socialism and communism” (Wessel, 1873: 377-379). For this reason teaching of classical languages that could give students an access to the antique literature, where the world of democracy of Ancient Greek polities and republican Rome was oftentimes idealized, was reduced in gymnasiums; whereas the greater hopes on “Zakon Bozhiy” with respect to it as “a correct education” of youth regarding the ideology of “Orthodoxy – Autocracy – Nationality” were expressed. Although, the same table illustrates that in the 1850-s supporters of classic education could partially won back the positions for classical languages thanks to the beliefs of minister of national education A. S. Norov, contradicting the decision of the emperor Nikolai I. After he had studied the expenses on the ministry of national education in 1852, Nikolai I considered expenditures on rewarding the teachers of the Ancient Greek language excessive and suggested to keep it only in two or three gymnasiums of the southern provinces (where the Greek population was located); whereas for the rest of them he believed the maintenance of Latin only was sufficient (mainly for training the gymnasium students in learning the scientific terminology of mathematical sciences, law, chemistry etc.). Due to the position of the minister it was managed to keep the Ancient Greek language in nine gymnasiums, but even there it was taught in a

smaller amount, than Latin, and both of them – in a smaller amount when compared to the amount in the 1830-1840s. At the same time the amount of religious training that was increased at their expense remained almost intact. Besides, learning of Latin began from the 2d class, Ancient Greek – from the 4th, and fundamentals of religion – from 1st class.

The period of “Great reforms” that began in Russia between the 1850-1860s found its reflection in the educational policy as well. Despite the liberal intentions of 1864 gymnasium reform, it did not reduce an amount of religious education at the secondary level, moreover, it did confirm a state requirement of a religious training as an important instrument of faithful education of young people. The 1864 gymnasium Charter declared a prior place of “Zakon Bozhiy” which was studied in all seven classes of gymnasium among other subjects; and the dichotomy of “classic” and “real” gymnasiums fixed by this reform didn’t affect the place of religion in them – in both types of gymnasiums it was taught in an identical amount (the Charter, 1864: 12-13). At the same time since 1864 Latin was taught from the 1 to the 7 class, and Ancient Greek (for the gymnasiums where it remained) – from the 2 to the 7 class. Nevertheless, if for the case of teaching fundamentals of religion, we can point to further strengthening of this subject positions after 1864, considering classic languages this strengthening only had a partial character: without any doubts in comparison to a late Nikolai’s gymnasium, “antique” component took more significant place; but at the same time “real” gymnasiums institutions where there were no place for classical languages, were finally legitimized. Besides, it should be noted that in female gymnasiums, the amount of which grew during the considered period, studying of classical languages was either absent or had variable character; whereas fundamentals of religion were taught there either at the same amount or at the amount that was even bigger than in male gymnasiums.

By the end of the 1860s the governmental policy changes towards the strengthening of conservative bases. For the secondary education the gymnasium Charter of 1871 manifested the changes that demoted the role of “real” education (Mustafina, Yermoshin, 2015), in particular, the status of “real” gymnasiums was lowered to “real” colleges that in its turn decreased significantly the opportunities of their graduates. The priority was given to classic gymnasiums again (the training period of them was increased from seven to eight years); and within them to classical languages. The weekly amount of Latin lessons in all classes grew to 49, the one of Ancient Greek – to 37 (in total – 86 lessons a week).

In Russian historiography, this reform, connected to the name of minister D. A. Tolstoy, is often estimated negatively. Soviet historians constantly refer to it as to an “extremely reactionary”. In their opinion, this reform expelled the progressive spirit from system of secondary education, that interpenetrated into a school under the influence of public and pedagogical movement of 1860s, and revived reactionary intentions specific to the gymnasiums of Nikolai I period (Smirnov, 1954: 310).

These conclusions are being confirmed by certain examples of reducing the hours of studying a number of disciplines for the sake of classical languages (Ganelin, 1941: 216-217). This assessment should lead the reader to a conclusion about the strengthening of a religious component in education, that logically follows from the “reactionism” of a new Charter. However, while criticizing the new Charter, Soviet historians ignore the fact that 1871 reform did not purely strengthen positions of religion in schools, but on the contrary, reduced the number of lessons of “Zakon Bozhiy” in favor of classical languages. The paradox lies in the fact that more progressive 1864 Charter increases an amount of religious training in a gymnasium curriculum, whereas the “reactionary” Charter of 1871 reduces it. Consequently, the process of strengthening of “classicism” in Russian pre-revolution secondary education can’t be identified with the strengthening of religion in it.

The 1871 Charter remained in use at the beginning of the XX century, however in 1890 the amendments on the educational process that drastically covered “religious” and “antique” blocks were made: the number of lessons of the Ancient Greek language in all classes per week was reduced to 33, Latin – to 42 (in general the amount of classical languages decreased in 11 hours per week); whereas the number of lessons of “Zakon Bozhiy” grew to 16: 2 lessons in each of 8 classes, disregarding further 4 lessons in a preparatory class (Curriculum, 1890).

There is no doubt that this “victory” of religion was reached thanks to the influence on the policy of the emperor Alexander III of Chief procurator of Holy Synod K. P. Pobedonostsev, who managed to deliver Russian elementary schools under the control of Church and aimed to enhance the religious principles in secondary and high schools. At the same time, unlike Nikolai I, K. P. Pobedonostsev did not consider classical languages politically unreliable. Therefore, the latter, although were reduced in their amount to some extent, did not lose the importance in classical gymnasiums, especially taking into account that the ministry of national education reacted jealously to the interference of Chief procurator into their affairs and admitted the increase of “Zakon Bozhiy” hours in 1890s quite reluctantly. A response to that interference was a demonstration that classical languages preserve a dominant position in Russian gymnasiums: in the same year of 1890 in submission to the State Council the minister of national education I. D. Delyanov claimed that classical languages remain “the main subject of teaching in gymnasiums” (Alyoshintsev, 1912: 342-343).

Here we observe an attempt to conciliate within the frames of ongoing counter reforms the blocks of classical languages and fundamentals of religion competing for the last decades, and, therefore, to attract into the ranks of supporters of classic nature of education those representatives of the conservative community, who supported strengthening of Church influence on gymnasiums and who involuntarily became allies of the liberal circles within the previous period, standing up for overcoming domination of “classicism” in Russian secondary school. However,

this vague measure did not allow to solve all the contradictions between religious course and general system of national gymnasiums that would find its reflections in discussions of the beginning of the XX century (Yermoshin, Mustafina, 2010).

So then, dynamics of quantitative rates shows presence of a competition between “religious” and “antique” components of gymnasium education for the prevalence in a general academic loading. Though the conflict between these blocks in their content part was even more noticeable. Contemporaries noticed that studying of fundamentals of religion in secondary educational institutions often contradicted with the general spirit of school, a tone of which, alongside with the political moods, was set by classical languages. Therefore, we must agree with the opinion of the pre-revolution researcher of this issue I. Alyoshintsev, that during the era of reforming of secondary education system the ally of a religious component in a gymnasium course was indeed the “real” nature of training; whereas classic education, according to the author, appears as its enemy: “Having this plenty of time of schooling spent for classical languages, it can not be the case that their studying was only limited to grammar; no doubt that children got also acquainted with classic outlook, and even more undoubted is that the classic world was strongly idealized. However, there can not be any hearty collaboration between classic and christian dogma, there can not be even a friendly assistance: they mutually exclude and deny each other: the former cultivates the spirit, the latter fosters the flesh – a contradiction bigger than can not exist; and when almost all subjects in a gymnasium fight with each other, it is the “Zakon Bozhiy” they fight at most” (Alyoshintsev, 1912: 343-344). That is why, according to this researcher, the basis of the program in a secondary school should be the elements not contradicting with the religious ones.

Thus, the domination of classical languages in Russian gymnasiums of the second half of XIX – beginning of the XX century became a subject to critics not only from the liberal public, but also from that part of the conservative camp that supported strengthening of Orthodox Church-ism at secular secondary school.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

As it was already mentioned, the problem of a correlation of fundamentals of religion and classical languages with each other and with the general program of secondary schools repeatedly became a subject to discussions during the considered period. It was especially obvious during the preparation and discussion of new gymnasium Charters. Appeals to review the significance of classical languages in education of a harmonious individual were often expressed within these discussions. “Recognition of Greek as a necessary element of the classic, i.e. comprehensively developing education, should now be referred to number of those rooted prejudices that are repeated faithfully, but for a justification of which nobody is able to adduce convincing arguments”, – claims one of the teachers in the considered period

(Elenev, 1889: 121). However, the same author protects studying of Latin as bases for modern European languages as well as scientific and technical terminology.

The domination of classical languages in Russian secondary school, by many teachers of that particular period was considered the main obstacle on the way to modernize educational paradigm. “Since the introduction of a classic system in 1871 and before the review of gymnasium programs in 1890 only classical languages and mathematics were considered to be major subjects in a gymnasium course, as long as all other subjects including in their number both “Zakon Bozhiy” and Russian, were considered to be the minor ones. Since 1890 these two subjects were listed among the principle subjects too”, – noted one of the St. Petersburg historians and teachers (Gurevich, 1900: 21). Discussion on reforming the system should have been conducted through a revision of this correlation.

However, among few supporters of preserving classical languages in gymnasiums there also were those who wished to overcome the long-term conflict between them and the fundamentals of religion, by taking a religious orientation in studying the Ancient Greek and Latin languages. So, the editor of “Magazine of the ministry of national education” believed that the Ancient Greek language, being primordial sacred language of the Orthodox Church, opens direct access not only to the Scripture of the New Testament in its original writing, but also to the mass of Orthodox Church chants and prayers in the language of their original (Georgiyevsky, 1901: 19). Having offered a rather detailed project of coordination of Ancient Greek and “Zakon Bozhiy” courses, he came to a conclusion that in case of high-quality of instruction by competent teachers students would get both a desire, and skills of constant studying of the Bible, and their interest to everything what concerns the Church would increase. Anyway while claiming an importance of religious training and education, this author, nevertheless, assigned only a supporting role to fundamentals of religion in practical application of knowledge of Ancient Greek, and, therefore, frankly declared: “It is impossible to overcome the spirit of disbelief distinguishing our time in any way different from delivering all religious education of our youth on strong scientific ground from the very beginning; the only mean for that is represented by Greek” (Georgiyevsky, 1901: 56).

Still, most of teachers of that time were skeptical about the perspectives of further preservation of classical languages in gymnasiums, offering in their projects either an essential reduction or their exception from the programs at all. Although at the same time these projects had no hint on expansion of teaching of fundamentals of religion as well. For example, through the elimination of the gymnasium course from the classical languages, teaching of a range of disciplines (even Ancient Greek art) was suggested to be enhanced, but similarly to the previous ones, all offered types of secondary schools still had 2 lessons of “Zakon Bozhiy” a week (Gurevich, 1900: 42-54).

During the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907 and formation of the Russian parliamentary system, the presence of religion at secondary school was openly criticized (Yermoshin, 2012). The result of this stage of discussions has been summed up after the Great Russian Revolution of 1917: in Soviet secondary schools teaching of both fundamentals of religion, and classical languages has been forcibly stopped. Researchers of the Soviet period, as it was already noted, emphasized “reactionary character” of these subjects (Smirnov, 1954; Ganelin, 1941).

Parallel to this, in the process of development of science and philosophy in the XX century there was a reconsideration of a role of language in public and individual consciousness (“Linguistic turn”). As a consequence, representatives of pedagogical community have changed their views on studying of classical languages. In particular, not a utilitarian approach (studying of language as an acquisition of the additional communicative competence realized in oral and written communication with native speakers of this language), but a linguoculturological – a development of classical languages as a way of expansion of mental culture of the personality, disclosure of the new horizons of consciousness, acquisition of the bases for better scientific cognition of surrounding reality, and also studying of modern European languages, turn out to be on a first place on this question (Yermoshin, Nikolaeva, 2016). For this reason during the Post-Soviet period studying of classical languages began to be introduced into practice of separate Russian schools again (more often – Latin, rarely – Ancient Greek). Positive experience of such training in secondary educational institutions is noted in numerous interviews with teachers and scientists for various scientific and educational Internet resources. In 2016 the Minister of Education of Russian Federation O. Vasilyeva has even introduced a motion of studying Greek at Russian schools as a second foreign language.

Attitude towards religion has also changed during the Post-Soviet period, including its presence at secondary school. Due to formation of the idea of “traditional values” characteristic of multinational and multi-confessional society of modern Russia and based on general ideals of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, an attempt to introduce “Bases of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” in secondary schools has been made, that, despite the declared culturological and not a dogmatic character, still states the presence of a religious element in the educational process. It has generated an extensive public and pedagogical discussion going on till this day.

Thus, fundamentals of religion and classical languages again find their place in Russian secondary school in the 1990-2000s. However, as it was before, their position is not identical. So, classical languages began to take roots into practice of secondary schools earlier (already between the 1980-1990s), but this phenomenon continues to have an “elite” character, remaining reality for a very limited number of educational institutions. The bases of religious culture (except for a number of the confessional schools realizing general education programs)

began to enter school practice only at the beginning of the second decade of the XXI century, i.e. much later, but already in a larger scale: today they are entered into practice in the majority of regions of Russian Federation. It is also proposed to expand teaching this discipline from one academic year up to several years. Unlike the teaching of classical languages itself, the latter question raises even more heated debates.

The secondary school in the Russian Empire reached the middle of the XIX century with quite developed traditions of teaching. In particular, important role in it played studying of classical languages (Ancient Greek and Latin) and fundamentals of religion. These traditional components of classical gymnasium education were in a conflict, represented in a competition for a quantitative presence (depending on changes of social and political situation within the country the quantity of lessons of religion was periodically reduced as long as the number of lessons of classical languages increased, and vice versa), and was also expressed in a certain substantial contradiction between them.

During the second half of the XIX century the role of classical languages in classic gymnasiums was so prominent that, according to contemporaries, it was difficult to call a course of a secondary school a program of general education: “the center of its gravity is concentrated only in classical languages, especially in grammar of these languages; for all the rest there is neither enough time and energy of students, nor is enough attention drawn to this, and the reputation of gymnasiums in the opinion of the administration depends almost exclusively on achievements in classical languages” (Elenev, 1889: 50).

More provoking was a fact that textbooks on fundamentals of religion appeared to be written in a sharp dogma-polemic tone, thereby, designated even more the frank internal conflict between this subject and a general course of secondary school. Its conflict with a main gymnasium element – the classic Greek-Roman literature that idealized the world lived upon the rules totally opposite to the principles of Christianity was especially sharp (Alyoshintsev, 1912: 279). This conflict took place not only in the external environment (in periodicals or in bureaucratic discussions during preparation of the next Charters, plans and programs), but mostly in school, in its pedagogical corporation, and, above all – in minds of the students. It hardly promoted harmonious development of studying youth.

At the same time during the considered period the position of religion at secondary school became stronger as it did not depend on division of educational institutions on “classic” and “real”, male and female; whereas classical languages remained the base of classic education. During the pedagogical discussions in the beginning of the XX century there were made attempts to conciliate these blocks within a single educational paradigm, in particular, by filling the teachings of Ancient Greek and Latin with Christian content. However, these projects were not performed due to the change of educational policy after the establishment of Soviet

regime and the termination of studying of fundamentals of religion and classical languages in secondary schools.

The experience of modern discussions on this problem, caused by attempts to return classical languages and religion in school education, shows that the contradictions specific for the second half of XIX – the beginning of XX century, remain to nowadays. With regards to this, further historical and pedagogical research of the observed problem is obviously important and urgent.

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