Innovations in social service (education) in state-church relations in the conditions of digitalization of society and pandemic

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of the study was to identify innovative approaches to activities in the system of state-church relations in social service (education) within the framework of interaction between an Orthodox Monastery and the Russian State Social University. The interaction between St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent and Russian State Social University (RSCU) has developed from conceptual foundations to the formation of a training system for Orthodox media. This article is the first to identify innovations: implementation of a modular, continuous model for the development of orphans in modern society, combining the efforts of secular and spiritual education; unification of philosophy and worldview, both religious and cultural, in the context of the digitalization of society and pandemic restrictions; formation of a multi-vector model of education with simultaneous development in several professional (church) directions and (or) an increase in social significance; use of hybrid forms of preparation and conduct of classes in a secular and church educational environment. The strong point of the article is a systematic approach to the study of the problem and the identified innovations, which make it possible to improve social service in the context of the digitalization of society and the COVID 19 pandemic. The use of the results obtained by other researchers can serve to develop the system of state-church relations in social service (education) of different faiths.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of civilization leads to increasing social stratification and the emergence and expansion of a range of vulnerable groups. State structures of various countries are looking for ways to reduce social tensions and develop mechanisms of assistance for poor citizens and migrants (Karácsony et al., 2021). Representatives of different religious denominations play a significant role in this regard. The basic confessions of particular states make the greatest contribution to social service. More often, they work in cooperation with state bodies.

The State is called upon to create favorable conditions for human activity, which is also a function of the church. The most important of these is the care of orphans, the elderly, and people in need. Different states have their own peculiarities in shaping and developing state-church relations. In Russia, a system of state charity based on the church was established under Catherine II. However, the first institution for orphans and illegitimate children was the orphanage opened under Peter I in 1706 by Metropolitan Iov in Kholmovo-Uspensky Monastery. The further development of state-church relations in the imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods was complex and contradictory. Despite this, the basic guidelines for the care of orphans, and street children remained unchanged, both in the attitude of the state and the church.

The rapid development of technology and the digitalization of society impose certain difficulties on state-church relations. Care for orphans is becoming more multifaceted. In the first place is the acquisition of modern education, allowing one to feel confident in adulthood, in the labor market. There is a need for specialists in perspective digital professions, who

can find a use for themselves both in secular and church life. This goal can be achieved through the joint efforts of state educational organizations and church structures. The leadership of St. Nicholas Convent in Chernoostrovsk and the Russian State Social University have taken this path by creating the Center for Orthodox Media (COM). Social service was directed primarily towards providing orphans with modern journalistic education, applicable both in church and secular life.

2. Literature review

The steady course toward the humanization of society ensures close attention to the issues of social service in modern society. This is the focus of scholars studying the problems of social welfare and state protection in the context of digitalization (Zhongyuan et al., 2020; Medvedeva et al., 2021), social exchange (Abubakar et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019), the possibility of improving the quality of life of people, especially children with disabilities, their socialization (Porayska-Pomsta et al., 2018). At the same time, the focus is on the formation of new approaches to solving social problems based on the interaction between science and religion (Geraci, 2020; Lee, 2019), social partnership (Frolova et al., 2016), highlighting the special role of religion in overcoming inequalities in the digital society (Singler, 2020a).

Structural changes that are taking place in the social and economic spheres complicate humanitarian activities. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), digitalization, and the introduction of AI have a contradictory impact on state and religious activities. At the same time, the nature and importance of higher education are changing (Gleason, 2018). There is a transformation of religious dogmas and images, which forces a deeper appreciation of the importance of humans and religion in the socio-technocratic human-religion-AI system (digitalization). What is their role in social service, the nature of state-church relations? A number of scientists believe that it is important in this system to give priority to God (Kaunda, 2020; Delio, 2020), to distribute the roles in the new paradigm between the religious figure properly, the state, and the "robot-monk" (Singler, 2020b; Tan, 2020). Indeed, digitalization and AI can act both as a helper and as an enemy of man (Burrell, 2019). Ideas of joint social service by representatives of different confessions appear (Cheong, 2011; Celik, 2020).

All of these innovations require legal evaluation and regulation in the state (Cheong, 2021). At the same time, threats to the social sphere arise from digitalization and the introduction of AI. They are also relevant for specific faiths, as well as for religion in general, for the entire civilization (Ahmed and La, 2021).

The field of education is the focus of many scholars studying social service. Some express opinions about the harmonious distribution of roles in higher education, others give priority to distance learning, online courses, and the need for constant adjustment of curricula for rapid adaptation in 4IR. There is a positive experience accumulated by the American Consortium for Online Learning on the effective use of the potential of digital learning in the humanities. Advanced technologies are being actively introduced into the educational process aimed at developing creative potential (Matraeva et al., 2020), and digital competencies that increase the chances of graduates of church and secular educational institutions in the labor market (Catacutan et al., 2020; Vinichenko et al., 2020). Research is underway to identify the most useful technologies for using AI in the educational process (Ossmy et al., 2019, Garnelo and Shanahan, 2019). Religious leaders are concerned about the limits of social media use (Hu et al., 2019).

Recently, the problem of providing universities with teachers with digital competencies has become more acute (Sanko, 2019), which affects their status.

The COVID-19 pandemic (Zimmermann et al., 2020; Bartik and Hershbein, 2020; IMF, 2020) added specific complexities to the social environment. The situation in the education system is complicated (Frolova and Rogach, 2021; Vinichenko et al., 2021). In this context, a search is underway to increase the effectiveness of state-church relations in social services in the field of education. The high relevance of the topic and the lack of research on the problem made the study necessary.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to identify innovative approaches to activities in the system of state-church relations in social service (education) within the framework of interaction between an Orthodox Monastery and a State Social University. Scientific tasks are as follows:

1. To determine the main strategic directions of interaction between the Orthodox Monastery and State Social University in social service (education).
2. To identify innovations in educational activities within the framework of interaction between St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent and the Russian State Social University.
3. To determine the procedure for the formation of communication and digital competencies among the pupils of the monastery, which are in demand in the labor market and in social service.

H1: The existing Russian system of state-church relations in social service (education) is of an evolving nature with an unused synergistic potential of joint actions of the state and the Orthodox Church, joint social service.

To identify innovative approaches to activities in the system of state-church relations in social service (education), the experience of St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent and Russian State Social

University in teaching and raising orphans were taken.

For many years, St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky convent has been developing its social service, organizing care for the elderly and young people, for orphans aged 3 to 18 years, extending it to the city of Maloyaroslavets and Maloyaroslavets district of Kaluga region. Orphans of the "Otrada" boarding house at the monastery receive a complete secondary education at the Orthodox gymnasium of the St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent.

After completing eleven grades, graduates of the "Otrada" boarding house go to study at the Orthodox Media Center (OMC)-a joint project of the St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent and the Russian State Social University. Students receive a state bachelor's degree in journalism. The main audience of students is graduates of the Orthodox gymnasium and sisters of the monastery, who were blessed to work with the media. Other students can also apply to study.

Russian State Social University trains specialists in the social sphere, focusing on the development of communication and digital competencies relevant to social service and social work.

General scientific and special methods were used in the article. A number of empirical methods were chosen to determine the main strategic directions of interaction between the Orthodox Monastery and State Social University in the sphere of education. The basis was the ranking, which was carried out by the experts in the focus group. Eight experts were invited to the focus group, who determined the importance of areas of joint activities of the Orthodox Monastery and State Social University in the field of education using content analysis of the regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation, subjects, local regulations, teaching, and methodological materials. The evaluation criteria were chosen: social significance, continuity of development, innovation of approaches, reliability of the result, social adaptability and security, and confidence of graduates in the labor market. The results obtained became the basis for scientific discussion to identify innovative approaches to the activities in the system of state-church relations in the sphere of education in the framework of interaction between the Orthodox Monastery and the state social university.

4. Research results and discussion

The study found that in the system of state-church relations in social service (education) of St. Nicholas Chernoostrovsky Convent and the Russian State Social University, activities are carried out in four main strategic areas, within which some innovative approaches are being implemented.

The first direction in the implementation of the educational process in the system of state-church relations in the context of digitalization is the implementation of a modular continuous model for the development of orphans in modern society within the framework of combining the efforts of secular and spiritual education. With the emergence of the Orthodox Media Center, the graduates of the boarding school and gymnasium of the Monastery acquired the opportunity to receive higher education within the walls of the monastery. That is, the monastery gives these children a full cycle of education. The continuity of education within the walls of the monastery with the involvement of a secular university in the education of orphans at the stage of obtaining higher education looks innovative. At the same time, two curricula are combined (secular and spiritual), which are not opposed to each other, but mutually complementary. Philosophy and religious philosophy, history, and history of the church. The humanitarian direction is important in the formation of the outlook and active social position of students since the social part of the upbringing of orphan girls requires more attention. From a young age, the monastery lays unshakable values. A liberal arts education forms the basis for a personal civic position, adaptation of graduates in a professional environment, and social sphere.

The second direction is the unification of philosophy and worldview, both religious and general cultural, in the context of the digitalization of society and pandemic restrictions. The created model looks unified and innovative. In it, the concept of "general cultural" assumes a harmonious development of morality on the basis of the ROC and the universal morality of Russian society. In this regard, special attention in the program is paid to such subjects as history, literature, history of the Church, religious philosophy, and theology. These objects in their complex, mutually complementing each other, form a full-fledged worldview. The level of culture is raised by expanding both the linguistic range and the philosophical and general cultural range. Journalistic subjects begin with the basics of working with texts, understanding the basics of the profession, with the history of the profession of journalism. This model has been transformed to a certain extent under the influence of the digitalization of society and the introduction of pandemic restrictions. There have been some changes in the philosophy, and culture of human behavior. New terminology has appeared. Learning has become increasingly remote, which entailed a change in the culture of communication and the technology of obtaining knowledge.

The transition to the correspondence (distance) form of education had both pluses and minuses. On the one hand, students began to participate more in monastic life, carry out obedience, which was an integral part of the educational process, and not devote all their time to study. But on the other hand, the rich activity of the monastery did not always allow full-fledged study, which affected the quality of education.

The third direction is the formation of a multi-vector model of education with simultaneous development in several professional (church) areas and (or) increasing social significance. The Orthodox

Media Center has educated and graduated 23 people during its ten years of operation. The activities of graduates can be divided into four areas: secular journalism, journalism in church, church service, and social service. An analysis of the data in Fig. 1 showed that the proportion of employed graduates of the Orthodox Media Centre in cooperation with RSCU was high. At the same time, 50 percent of graduates are employed in the field of specialization. The preparation of graduates for social service is a particular issue. It is not reflected in the section on employment but has a practical aspect for the society-the formation of a new member of society in accordance with basic values.
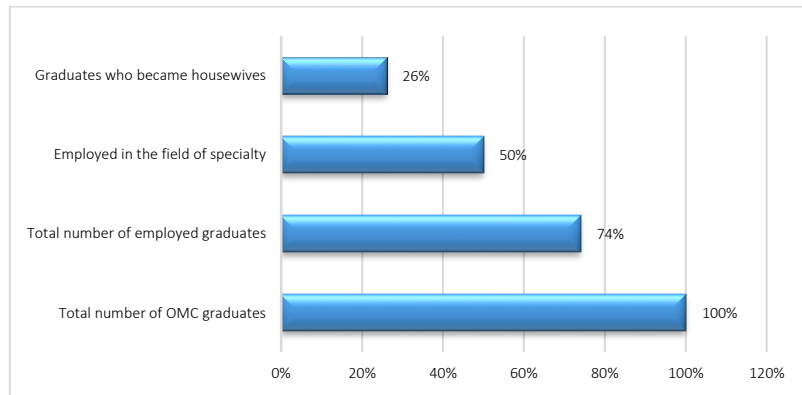

Fig. 1: The nature of employment of RSCU Orthodox Media Centre graduates

Social service is reflected in activities such as housekeeping and raising children. During the discussion, experts noted that it is not reflected in the labor market, but its significance for society is great. First, solving a demographic problem that is important for society and the country. Out of 23 graduates, 9 have children, 6 of them are housewives, 2 of them have 4 and 5 children. Secondly, despite the fact that the graduates did not enter the labor market, they perform an important social function they bring up a new person for society in accordance with the existing canons of morality. They invest in their children a high level of knowledge (at the level of their education), an understanding of the world, and the upbringing of future generations. The correct (Orthodox) values, the values of the Russian people, which have always been kept by churches and monasteries, are transmitted. In these families, children have a wide range of interests, they are strong in spirit, with strong motivational development. The methodology of thinking and the vision of the world through higher education allows the graduates of the OMC and RSCU to bring up children who are kinder, calmer, and more benevolent to other people, regardless of religion. An aggressive social environment is neutralized by such an upbringing. The peculiarity of this model is that for the graduates of the OMC, the function of parents was performed by the monastery, abbess, and nuns. They imparted spiritual warmth to them. In the future, nursing education, and education at a social university with a secular accent is passed on to future generations through those who have become housewives.

Thus, the constructed multi-vector training model with simultaneous development in several professional (church) areas and (or) an increase in social significance is innovative in nature and presupposes continuous comprehensive church-secular education and upbringing. Professional, mixed professional-church and a special area of training for orphans involve the formation of models and values of a person of the future through the graduates' assuming the role of mother, the role of educator, the role of the creator of the person of the future, taking into account information technologies, digitalization of society based on basic traditional values. The fourth area within which innovative approaches are being implemented is the use of hybrid forms of training and conducting classes in a secular-church educational environment. In the focus group, it was noted that in modern conditions, graduates of the shelter need a full-fledged humanitarian education to ensure confidence in the labor market in adult life outside the monastery. With the digitalization of society and the introduction of artificial intelligence, there is an urgent need to develop digital, communication, and media competencies. The labor market needs them, but it is more acute in the church (Orthodox) environment. The Church and the monastery, as part of it, feel the need to create a new type of communication both within themselves and with society as a whole.

Therefore, within the framework of a joint project (the Orthodox Media Centre), a media direction (journalism) was chosen with an emphasis on digitalization and artificial intelligence. To provide it, the Mother Superior of the monastery, Abbess Nikolaya, together with the leadership of the RSCU, carried out a set of measures to create and equip classrooms. The introduction of multimedia equipment, computers, and the introduction of the Internet into the secular-church educational environment within the walls of the monastery with elements of distance learning was innovative. A hybrid format of using offline and online forms of teaching orphans was chosen. This became especially relevant during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The appearance and

introduction of these new technologies into the educational process made it possible to attract several teachers and experts to the lesson at once, as well as to save the past lesson in a recording for viewing by those who could not attend.

Rapidly changing trends have influenced the change in the Centre's curriculum and program. The program includes online lectures with constant feedback (online surveys), master classes, online group work, and training. Masterclasses are held with the participation of specialists and graduates, as well as master's students trained in the same direction. An online training course incorporating the main areas of media competence has been established. At the same time, individual educational routes (trajectories of development) for orphans began to be designed, depending on professional needs.

With the development of social networks, with the transition from traditional journalism to network journalism, new competencies have become in demand, such as copywriting, working with information, media planning, project management, and possession of computer programs. Items that enhance practical skills have appeared. This is work with sound, photo, video, and work in social networks. Particular attention was paid to the development of communication skills.

The joint education of orphans by church leaders and representatives of the secular education of the social sphere was first carried out in a test mode since both sides did not have experience of such interaction. During the experiment, it was possible to identify problem areas in these innovations. First, there is an unusual format for combining secular and theological disciplines of the higher education curriculum with the subjects necessary for the course in Orthodox journalism.

Second, the original combinatorics of the teaching staff: ministers of the Church were invited for theological disciplines, and the disciplines of higher education were taught by university teachers. For all participants in the educational process, this was unusual, and at the first stage, it imposed some psychological discomfort, taking into account the fact that among the students there were not only high school graduates but also the sisters of the monastery.

Third, in the course of studying at the monastery, the requirements of the higher school for the free, creative acquisition of knowledge using digital and communication technologies intersected with a strict monastery charter. The children participating in the life of the monastery certainly had their own routine, other peculiarities, and restrictions, at first they were not allowed to use the Internet. The first graduates of the Center did not have access to the Internet at all. Further training showed that without the involvement of modern interactive technologies, a full-fledged learning process is impossible. Even the extensive library of the monastery did not allow one to master the studied material in a high-quality manner and quickly navigate in acquaintance with the field of the media. Moreover, the media at this time actively began to move to digital format using social networks and artificial intelligence.

5. Conclusion

The study found that activities in the system of state-church relations in the field of education within the framework of interaction between the Orthodox monastery and the state social university are carried out in four main strategic areas within which some innovative approaches are being implemented: the implementation of a modular continuous model for the development of orphans in modern society within the framework of combining the efforts of secular and spiritual education; unification of philosophy and worldview, both religious and general culture in the context of digitalization of society and pandemic restrictions; the formation of a multi-vector training model with simultaneous development in several professional (church) areas and (or) an increase in social significance; the use of hybrid forms of preparation and conduct of classes in a secular-church educational environment.

The analysis of the essence of the directions of activity showed that they are based on such innovative approaches as the continuity of complex church-secular education and the upbringing of orphans within the walls of the monastery through the joint efforts of secular and spiritual education; unification of the philosophical and cultural model of development in the context of digitalization of society and pandemic restrictions; realizing the potential of graduates in four areas: secular journalism, journalism in the church environment, church ministry, social service; the introduction of multimedia equipment, computers, conducting the Internet into the secular-church educational environment within the walls of the monastery with elements of distance learning. In fact, the clusters themselves are innovative.

The hypothesis has been generally confirmed: the existing Russian system of State-Church relations in social service (education sector) is developing with untapped synergistic potential for joint action by the State and the Orthodox Church, joint social service. Innovative approaches are being developed to enhance its effectiveness in order to create synergies.

The problem areas for the introduction of innovations have been identified: An unusual format for combining secular and theological disciplines of the curriculum of a higher school with the subjects necessary for a course in Orthodox journalism; original combinatorics of the teaching staff with the emergence of psychological discomfort at the beginning of the interaction; the intersection of the requirements of higher education for the free, creative acquisition of knowledge using digital and communication technologies and with the strict monastic charter.

The results obtained can be used to improve the system of state-church relations in social service

(education) of various confessions while preserving the conceptual foundations of these religious trends and universal cultural values, increasing the efficiency of secular-spiritual interaction.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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