It is obvious that Russia as a multinational and poly-confessional state with a rich history is influenced by religious traditions in its cultural and political life. First of all, we mean the impact of Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam as leading religions that are traditional to Russian history and modernity. This article will give a concise survey of an important area in which this impact is felt, that is, the educational one. But before turning to this topic, we need to specify and describe certain concepts that are actively used in the official documents and pedagogical life of present-day Russia.

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Traditional (culture-formative) religions

The current Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) proclaims the secular nature of the state and explicitly affirms: “No religion may be established as a state or obligatory one” (article 14, paragraph 1). Paragraph 2 of the same article states: “Religious associations shall be separated from the state and shall be equal before the law”. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, there are no official statistics concerning the number of believers belonging to different religions or/and denominations. However, according to sociological research, 64 per cent of Russian citizens identify themselves as Orthodox, 1 per cent belong to other Christian denominations, 6 per cent proclaim themselves Muslims, about 1 per cent are followers of other religions including Judaism and Buddhism, and 25 per cent identify themselves as unbelievers1.

In 2009, during the meeting of Russian president (from 2008-2012) Dmitry Medvedev with the leaders of “centralized religious organizations” (represented by heads of Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism), a concept of “traditional religions” was authorized (although, of course, it had been used before). This concept covers the aforesaid four denominations. Soon afterwards another term was introduced to pedagogical practice, that is, “culture-formative religions” (“kulturo-obrazuiuschie religii”), which was used as a synonym (more appropriate for school life) for “traditional religions”. The “traditional” or “culture-formative” religions were granted the right to be represented as single modules of the unified course “Principles of religious cultures and secular ethics”, intended to be taught in the 4th and 5th grades (at secondary schools). Let it be noted that the short-list of “culture-formative religions” does not include such Christian denominations as Catholicism and Lutheranism, in spite of their obvious roots in Russian history.

Eastern Orthodoxy as culture-formative religion: the dynamics of recent years

First of all, and rightfully, the notion of a traditional religion refers to Eastern Orthodoxy. For Russia, it is the most important religious tradition, officially present in the country from the times of the Baptism of Russia (988). After the death of Patriarch Alexy II (5. 12. 2008) and the election of Metropolitan Kirill (1. 02. 2009) to the Patriarch’s throne, there began an era of dynamic development of Church institutions and closer

cooperation between the Church and the state. The idea, proclaimed in 2000, of the Church’s participation in the implantation of Christian values when making important social decisions on the national and international levels, started to be put into practice. Unlike Patriarch Alexy II, who had held a mainly neutral, detached position in regard to the state, political parties and conflicts, from the very beginning of his administration Patriarch Kirill took the course of active participation by the Church in the social and political life of the country and of close contacts with governmental structures and bodies at both the federal and regional levels.

From 2009 to 2013 there were various changes in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church itself, demonstrating and strengthening its official, political and administrative role in the state.

First to be noted was significant growth in the parishes and the opening of new church buildings, as well as the adoption and application of Federal law № 327-FZ “On the transfer of state or municipal religious property to religious organizations”. The law, passed in 2010, describes mechanisms of transferring the deed of ownership or free use of religious objects owned by the state, regions or municipalities, to religious organizations. And although the law concerns various religious traditions (other Christian denominations as well as Islam), the largest amount of property can be transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church. Concentrating in its possession tracts of land and buildings belonging to former monasteries, temples, shrines and ecclesiastical educational institutions, the Orthodox Church has become one of the largest property owners in Russia. A significant criterion is the increase in the number of parishes. In the first year of Patriarch Kirill’s administration alone (2009), the number of parishes under the Moscow Patriarchate increased by almost 900 and reached the number 30,142. In the beginning of 2013 the number of

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5 Rossijskaya gazeta, 3 december 2010, No. 274.
churches where regular services take place amounted to 33,489. The growth of parishes was accompanied by a growth in the number of priests.

Secondly, in 2011-2012 was launched the process of converting large dioceses into metropolitan sees, which in turn were divided into dioceses. The purpose of this reform, in the course of which the number of bishops significantly increased, consisted of making the management of Church life more mobile, faster, closer to the parishes’ concerns and problems. In parallel with this, the central administrative authorities of the Moscow Patriarchate were undergoing a reforming process. For the last 3 or 4 years the architecture of Church management has gotten significantly more complicated and differentiated. Structures were created such as the Synodal Department for relations between the Church and society, the Synodal Committee for relations with the Cossacks, the Synodal Department for prison service, the Patriarchal Council for culture, and a number of other departments, boards and commissions.

Thirdly, it is necessary to specify what the main theme of this article is: the efforts of the Orthodox Church directed towards developing religious education.

Religion in present-day Russian education. Religious education

Now, at different levels and in different formats, there are ongoing discussions about the place of religion in Russian education. Meanwhile, in recent years certain decisions had already been taken: a special course, “Principles of religious culture and secular ethics” was introduced in schools, at the junction point between primary and secondary (basic) schooling. There is no end to disputes about the possibility and expediency of integrating religious education (primary, secondary, higher and postgraduate) into a nation-wide system that would meet applicable legal standards and accreditation requirements.

Among the theoretical and practical problems faced by the educational community these can be identified: the content of the standards of professional theological education and their conformity to the very essence of theology (Orthodox, Islamic etc.); problems of significant changes in the content of theological education in Church high schools in case of their

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6 S. FIRSOV, Tserkov’i gosudarstvo pri Sviateyschem Patriarkhe Kirille (Gundiaeeve): osnovniye tendentii razvitiya, p. 355.
7 Ibidem, p. 356.
reorientation to the state educational standards; issues of licensing and accreditation of religious high schools; prospects of training specialists in social-humanitarian and educational areas in religious educational institutions; issues of teaching confessional theology in secular (state and non-state) schools.

Secular and religious education are separate. As a rule, by secular education one usually means laic, civil education, which falls under the legal guardianship of the state and under public control. The main feature of secular education is the lack of ecclesiastical control and the absence of religious, doctrinal content.

At the same time, the term “religious education”, which would seem to mean the opposite of the secular, is ambiguous in use. We do not designate as religious education those non-confessional educational programs oriented toward religious and cultural studies and proceeding from the principle of multiculturalism in modern society. That kind of program is intended to foster tolerance and respect for various religious and ethnic cultures in students by acquainting them with the core moral values of different religions and with their denominational peculiarities.

In the Russian cultural and linguistic area the term “religious education” takes on much more weight and meaning, if we denote with it the phenomenon of educational models and systems developed through many centuries and having at their basis different kinds of theological worldview. The content of religious education includes, along with general and professional components, a doctrinal teaching, and the whole process of training is based on the principles of education appropriate for the respective religion, for example, for Islam.

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9 Theological and laic education systems in Russia were separated beginning the epoch of Peter the Great’s modernization. See D. SHMONIN, *Institutionalization of philosophy in Russia: the first universities in the 18th century*, in: *Innovazione filosofica e università tra Cinquecento e primo Novecento (La filosofia e il suo passato)*, Gr. Piaia, M. Forlivesi (ed.). Padova, CLEUP, 2011, pp. 165-184.
Let us turn to a brief analysis of the progress in religious education in post-Soviet and contemporary Russia. The first educational standard in theology was approved by the Ministry of Education in 1992, and in state and non-state (confessional and private) universities began the implementation of undergraduate programs in theology. As soon as it became clear that “non-confessional” theology is impossible, in the standard were included courses that should be taught in all the universities (philosophy, sociology, foreign languages etc.), as well as professional disciplines common to all faiths (history of world religions, ethics, law etc). Faith-based disciplines, whose structure and should be agreed upon with representatives of the leadership of that denomination, also became part of the educational standard. In 1999, the bachelor’s standard was supplemented with the master’s standard. As to higher educational levels, the problem has not been resolved yet: the list of academic degrees, which in our country are subject to the award or approval of the Supreme Attestation Commission affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Science, does not include theology. Thus the scientific degrees “candidate in theology” and “doctor in theology”, which are awarded by the state universities, are not officially recognized, although they are taken into account to some extent when the University implements procedures of licensing and state accreditation.

Nevertheless, in autumn 2013, after the new federal law on education in the Russian Federation (1.09.2013) had gone into force, a significant breakthrough in this direction was outlined. The Russian Ministry of Education and Science has approved the new list of directions for the preparation of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral students, according to which the standard of postgraduate studies should be developed and introduced. This, in turn, must sooner or later lead to the next logical step: the recognition, at the state level, of official degrees of both candidate and doctor in theology. The state should also install a procedure of approving theological dissertations.

Orthodox theological education

Orthodox theological education began to develop quite actively. Among state institutions were classic (Omsk, Altai and other) and pedagogical (Nizhny Novgorod) universities that started teaching in this area. New Orthodox educational institutions were created: in Moscow, the Orthodox St. Tikhon Theological Institute (now University), the Orthodox St. John University and St. Philaret Institute; in St. Petersburg, the Institute of Philosophy and Theology (now part of the Russian Christian Academy of Humanities); in Volgograd, Tsaritsin Orthodox University; in Novosibirsk, Holy Makaryevsky Orthodox Theological Institute, and a

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number of other institutions.

Orthodox theology is taught not only in the aforesaid new schools, but also in the traditional Church institutions, that is, in theological academies (in Russia there are two: the Moscow and St. Petersburg Orthodox Theological Academies, offering bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral programs), as well as in theological seminaries (with rare exceptions, bachelor’s degrees), which exist in a number of large regional centers. The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kirill takes a very active stance. It demands that the Church’s educational institutions make efforts towards integration into the secular state educational system. One of the testimonies to the rapprochement with it can be seen in the hiring of secular professors for religious teaching, as well as in its aspiration to licensing and obtain state accreditation.

Islamic organizations and Muslim education in Russia

In the last 20 years the development of Muslim education underwent noticeable progress. Islamic universities appeared in Moscow, Kazan, Ufa; in Nizhny Novgorod an Islamic Institute was created; in Makhachkala (Republic of Dagestan) the North-Caucasian Center of Islamic Education and Science opened its doors. In different regions of Russia appeared a number of madrassas. Over the past two decades these institutions have gone through a difficult process of formation and development.

It should be noted that the administrative structure of Muslim organizations in Russia is more complex.

Now in Russia there are more than 40 independent spiritual administrations of Muslims. Most of them form part of three main centralized organizations claiming federal status. It is, first, the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia and the European CIS countries, which dates its history from the first Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly, established by Empress Catherine II in 1788. The organization is headquartered in Ufa and is headed by Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin. Other Muslim administrative structures are the Council of Muftis of Russia in Moscow (its chairman is Mufti Ravil Gainutdin) and the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus.

In 2005 the leading Islamic institutions of higher education, established by various spiritual directorates and Muslim organizations, were included in the non-profit “Council for Islamic Education” partnership. Regarding the list of major issues the Council was designed to resolve, we can emphasize the drafting of centralized policy in the field of Islamic religious education and the creation of a single educational space in this sphere. The Council is to coordinate the activity of all organizations implementing programs of religious education.
programs of religious education. Taking into account the not always simple relationship between various Muslim organizations at the federal and inter-regional levels, we could hardly expect quick success in this regard. However, the Council has made important decisions concerning the development and ratification of common intra-confessional standards, curricula, and sample programs for religious disciplines taught at the Islamic spiritual educational institutions. It is hoped that the work of the Council, complicated by differences within the Muslim establishment, will make it possible to carry out these and other strategic tasks in the developing Islamic education in our country.

In fact, it seems necessary to create a systemic solution for a number of problems, such as establishing certification procedures for Islamic educational organizations; creating a system of professional training and retraining for Muslim clergy of various levels; gaining expertise in the field of book publishing (referring to religious and theological Islamic literature); coordinating educational work in schools according to a spirit of patriotism and civic consciousness. It is especially important that Islamic education be included in the whole Russian secular and religious educational space.

It should be noted that the federal authorities are aware of the need to support Islamic education and to integrate it into the common space of education. There is a government-funded program of support for Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions have partners among the major universities (St. Petersburg State University, Kazan State University, Moscow Linguistic University). The difficult task is preparing specialists with profound knowledge of Muslim culture that could replenish the ranks of the Muslim clergy. Additionally, those specialists could become teachers at universities and schools: this is especially important for those regions of Russia where the Muslim population predominates.

Note, at the end of this subject, that the difficulties typical of developing Islamic education are clearly visible in the discussions going on within the Muslim community. In these discussions, there are both those who consider maximum integration into the formal educational system necessary and those who believe that Islamic universities should be theological schools preparing professional theologians, and that the state should not interfere with the educational process and content of education.
Other Christian denominations and their educational establishments

Let us briefly examine the state of affairs in other Christian denominations that have their own schools and are present in the cultural and social environment of Russia.

In the last 20 years other Christian denominations created or restored their own educational institutions. Active since 1993 in Moscow, and since 1995 in St. Petersburg, is the “Mary, Queen of the Apostles” Catholic Higher Theological Seminary. In St. Petersburg there is the Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria. Unfortunately, the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran (German) Church is currently inactive. Each of these theological schools and the ecclesiastical institutions behind them has a different view of their future development, their educational, scientific and theological work.

Let us note “in parentheses” that Orthodox universities are faced with a set of complicated tasks: on the one hand, rapprochement with the secular Russian system of education; on the other hand, preserving the traditions of theological schools. The difficulty is explained by the fact that the right to issue standard state diplomas (recognized everywhere and indispensable for getting a job in Russia) pertains exclusively to those educational institutions that have gained state accreditation.

If we talk about Catholic and Lutheran schools, they have a cautious attitude toward the prospect of accreditation. Every ecclesiastical educational institution, guided by the policy of its hierarchy and evaluating the situation from a certain position, chooses its own path of development: it can be movement towards accreditation, or consolidation with leading confessional universities abroad, or focusing on the implementation of licensed (but not accredited, according to Russian rules) theological programs. Pastors cannot be prepared in isolation from the Church: that is why the leadership of the “Mary, Queen of the Apostles” Catholic Seminary in St. Petersburg, for example, follows the path of distancing itself from the state educational standards of Russia, considering them to be too secular and to depersonalize the process of educating priests. A Catholic Seminary is affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University in Italy, and therefore may provide their graduates with Church diplomas afforded some recognition in the West. A similar position is held by the administration of the Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria: a license for conducting educational activities is indispensable, but there is no need for the accreditation procedure, which in Russian reality is extremely bureaucratic.
Conclusions

In the present paper we have considered only the dynamic side of higher religious education in present-day Russia. As a result of this review, we can conclude that, on the one hand, a professional religious education within the framework of various religious traditions and denominations is experiencing the same problems as the whole educational system of the country, and that these issues are connected with global processes. On the other hand, denominations have the chance to be more independent and to exercise reasonable conservatism in their confrontation with the secular standardization of education, because both religion and education are the most important and the oldest institutions that guarantee the conservation and development of culture and the functioning of civil society.