

## Article

# Work with Youth in the Russian Orthodox Church in the Contemporary Period

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**Abstract:** Modern Russia is undergoing changes, including religion. In the Soviet Union, in contrast to the Western world, there was not only an active and rapid social secularization, but also a violent atheization of the population. As for the youth, due to the notorious atheism, there was a lack of youth's religiosity. After the collapse of the USSR, it became necessary to implement effective measures so that Orthodoxy could adequately respond to the "challenge of the time". Under these conditions, the organization of work with youth in the ROC began to revive. The major research objective was to study the Russian Orthodox Church's main forms of work with youth in the post-Soviet period. Our research was conducted in the Ural region, one of the largest regions of the Russian Federation. The research methodology used a qualitative approach (in-depth interviews). Our research, based on informants' opinions, has identified three forms of groups who work with the Russian youth through the Russian Orthodox Church. They are: traditional church forms (organizing groups for the study of the Holy Scriptures, doctrinal (catechism) classes, missionary activities, etc.), traditional secular forms (children's and youth's camps, young family clubs, sports and military-patriotic clubs, addiction prevention and social projects, etc.) and innovative forms (Internet projects, Internet communities, Orthodox forums, Orthodox cafes, bars, etc.). Our study has revealed that religious phenomena and manifestations of religiosity are observed in totally different areas, such as cultural, economic, educational, leisure, etc. The study has elucidated that the work of the Russian Orthodox Church fits into the framework of this paradigm, thus confirming T. Luckmann's theory.

**Keywords:** youth; Russian Orthodox Church; traditional church work; traditional secular work; innovative work; religiosity



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## 1. Introduction

In modern Russia, young people differ from other age groups in terms of their level of religiosity, which allowed some experts to start publicly discussing the impending crisis of faith among young people, similar to the processes taking place in Europe over the past thirty years (Bullivant 2018; Pollack 2008). Conditionally, two generations of modern Russian youth can be distinguished. The first one is "Yeltsin's" generation, including people born in the 1990s, and the second one is "Putin's" generation, born in the early 2000s. If the first generation were living in conditions of socio-cultural pluralism, then the period of socialization of the second generation is characterized by clearly expressed attempts by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to strengthen its influence on the spiritual life of society, which led to a decline in its authority among the new generation and a general decrease in the level of religiosity of the population, including young people. It does not mean an increase in the number of convinced atheists, but is about an increase in indifference towards religion.

Today, more and more publications appear in the Russian and Western European scientific discourse, based on the data of representative surveys, which show a decrease in the level of religiosity of young people in Russia (Tikhomirov 2017; Roshchina 2018;

Radaev 2018). A number of researchers associate with the fact that young people are characterized by a certain blurring of religious consciousness and worldview, “delayed churching” and “deferred religiosity” (Chesnokova 2009; Mchedlov 2005; Tikhomirov 2017). With the transition to older age groups, youth will be characterized by an increase in religious consciousness and religiosity. Other scientists believe that this is due to the specificity of generations, each of which socializes in a different social and institutional context, where the issues of institutional religion are in the background compared to personal spiritual growth, material well-being, etc. (Orekhanov 2015; Kolkunova 2015; Radaev 2018). In this regard, the generation that grew up in the 1980s and 1990s and experienced a “religious renaissance” after seventy years of violent secularization will have a greater “religious consciousness” than the generation of their children growing up in the 2010s in the era of religious freedom, pluralization of views and individualization (Orekhanov 2014). As for the youth who lived in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, due to the notorious atheism, there was a lack of religiosity among the vast majority of young people as a result of the repressive policies pursued by the communist regimes (Volokitina 2009a, 2009b; Murashko and Odintsov 2003; Murashko and Filimonova 2014). Zabaev, Mikhailova, Oreshkina, Zadorin, Khomyakova and others associate youth’s religiosity with a change in the very social context of the religiosity analysis, in which indicators that have clear connotations and stability in one period of time acquire volatility and ambiguity in another. As a stable marker of national and cultural identity in the 1990s and 2000s, religious identity, according to scholars, became increasingly unstable in the 2010s, when the ROC entered the public sphere characterized by its own rules (Zabaev et al. 2018; Zadorin and Khomyakova 2019). In this sense, belonging to Orthodoxy today may reflect not so much the internal religious beliefs and identity of a person, but rather be a marker of public expression of one’s position, especially among young people, in connection with certain events related to church institutions or the expression of public confidence in the ROC (Uzlaner 2020).

Foreign sociologists also write about the decline in the religiosity of the population. A substitutionary religion implies the “delegation” of the responsibility to believe, to regularly perform religious rituals and to lead the way of life prescribed by the church to an “active minority, but on behalf of a much larger number of people who (even if not explicitly) not only understand, but rather and unequivocally approve of the fact that a minority performs” (Grace 2006, p. 22). D. Voas writes that in many European countries, there is a decline in religiosity, however, most of the population still does not immediately move into a completely non-religious group, retaining some connection with religion. Voas calls this fact a “residual” religiosity or “fuzzy fidelity” (Voas 2008). S. Cohen and L. Blitzer use the concept of “belonging without believing” to describe the religiosity of American Jews (Cohen and Blitzer 2008). Analyzing the religious situation in Italy, R. Cipriani introduces the concept of “diffused religion”, meaning that religion continues to play an important role in the formation of a certain value background and guidelines for action, even in a situation of a general decline of religious faith and practices (Cipriani 1988).

To maintain and form the religiosity of the population, especially young people, purposeful work of the church is necessary.

We understand that Western researchers mainly study the modern experience of working with youth in the Roman Catholic Church (Parish Resource Manual for Youth Ministry 2013; Webbera et al. 2010) and Protestant (Chu et al. 1997; Youth Ministry Handbook and Leadership Training Manual 2005) communities. Therefore, the purpose of our study is a sociological analysis of the main forms of work with youth in the ROC in the post-Soviet period, taking into account the fact that Orthodoxy is the leading religion in the Russian Federation.

## 2. Materials and Methods

At present, in the sociology of religion, in contrast to the previously dominant paradigm of secularization, the thesis of “religious change” has been established (Bender et al. 2012; Pollack 2008). The difference between these two perspectives is well-

manifested in the approaches to the study of religiosity. The first approach is guided by the basic distinction “religious/secular” and is aimed, as a rule, at clarifying the indicators of religiosity and their quantitative measurement. The idea that the sphere of religion is limited to a certain set of locations, practices and symbols directs the research focus only to traditionally/classically religious phenomena and, therefore, religiosity is conceptualized in accordance with them. The approach of religious transformation is based on the idea of open boundaries between religious and secular and mixing them at different levels (society as a whole, institutional and individual). This vision makes it possible to detect religious phenomena and manifestations of religiosity in completely different spheres, such as cultural, political, economic, educational, etc. One of the representatives of the paradigm of “religious transformation” is T. Luckman, who considers modern religiosity through transcendence, which is not reducible to either the substantial or functional definitions of religion. Luckman substantiates the various social forms of religion, which become the starting point for determining the spheres of life, which are the basis of our methodology (Luckmann 1967).

### 2.1. Participants (Informants)

Fifty people who play leading roles in the different kinds of work with youth were defined as informants. Among them were twenty clergymen (all of them graduated from the seminary, two have a secular higher education such as biological and pedagogical) of one of the Urals Dioceses, five employees of the Department for youth affairs (one has a secondary education, two have scientific degrees in the humanities, one graduated from a seminary and a social university and one has a higher legal education), eight members of the Coordinating Council for the Youth Ministry of the Diocese (one has a higher secular education, one graduated from a Construction College and six graduated from different Ural’s Universities), ten members of Orthodox youth organizations (four are students of the Ural’s universities, two graduated from the Ural’s University, one graduated from Technological College, three graduated from school) and seven course participants (four graduated from the Ural’s university, three graduated from the Ural’s Colleges). All informants are men aged from 25 to 55 years old. They have different religious backgrounds. All informants live in the Middle Urals, Russia. The Middle Urals (Yekaterinburg is the capital) is one of the largest regions of Russia.

### 2.2. Research Procedure, Data Collection and Analysis Strategy

The research methodology used a qualitative approach. The primary data were collected using in-depth interviews. Fifty 120 min in-depth-interviews were conducted at the end of 2019 and in the beginning of 2020.

In the study, we have chosen a qualitative strategy, such as the in-depth interview method, due to the fact that we study the topic of religion, which is a sensitive one (Glaser 1978). This topic is related to faith, the meaning of life, etc. In-depth interviews involve direct engagement with individual participants. It is a qualitative data collection method where the interviewer can ask the participants different questions based on their responses. In-depth interviews prove to be highly helpful in situations where individual participants’ emotions, sentiments, opinions, values, etc., are an important part of the study. In-depth interviews are helpful when you want to: learn more about your informants and relevant aspects of their lives, work, their experiences, motivations and worldviews, and to get a deeper understanding of any problems that informants speak about (Patton 2005; Flick 2006; Boeije 2010; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Kelle 2005).

The respondents were asked questions relevant to the aim of the study. During this time, informants participated in a conversation on the following questions: Have you attended training courses; Why? Who taught you in the course? What traditional church forms of youth work do you use? Are they interesting to young people? Are these forms of

work effective in attracting youth to religion? What new forms of youth work do you use? etc.

The interviews were transcribed, following generally accepted transcription rules (Dresing et al. 2015). All information that could reveal the identity of the interviewee, such as names, age and other information, was anonymized. We assigned the interviewees a pseudonym, age and their position. The interviews were coded by employing NVivo software. In the process of categorizing the codes, the coding categories were revised. The researchers organized codes based on the informants' opinions referring to a particular topic, using a hierarchical framework: the top-level nodes describe the topic (religious activity of the ROC/secular activity of the ROC), the middle-level nodes define the topic (traditional religious activity of the ROC/traditional secular activity of the ROC/innovative activity of the ROC) and at the third level, an attribute on a specific topic is detailed (e.g., traditional religious activity: doctrinal (catechism) classes, Holy Scriptures groups etc., traditional secular activities, e.g., youth camps, social projects, etc., and innovative activities, e.g., network communities on the Internet, Orthodox cafes, bars, etc.).

The purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the ROC forms of work with youth. In the following results sections, we offer more detailed information about the revival of the ROC in the post-Soviet period, about the personnel and forms of work with youth. There are five results sections, each of which includes the informants' opinions referring to the identified problems.

### 3. Revival of Work with Youth in the Russian Orthodox Church

The organization of work with youth in the ROC began to improve during the perestroika period, when the Communist Party abandoned its policy of atheizing the population, and in 1990, the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" came into effect. In December of the same year, at the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was decided to establish a single youth church organization. In January of 1991, with the blessing of Patriarch Alexei II, a Congress of Orthodox Youth was held in Moscow, in which delegates from all dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church and representatives of foreign youth Christian organizations such as the Russian Student Christian Movement, the World Movement of Orthodox Youth "Syndesmos" and others took part. The result of the congress was the creation of the All-Church Orthodox Youth Movement (ACOYM), the adoption of its charter and the election of governing bodies. Representatives of Orthodox brotherhoods, youth parish organizations and scout groups have been included in the ACOYM. Its main goal was "to unite Orthodox youth in the service of the Orthodox Church, as well as to bring to Christ those who are outside the saving church fence" (History of the Department).

After the collapse of the USSR and a sharp increase in interest in religion on the part of various strata of society, including the younger generation of Russians, it became necessary to implement effective measures so that Orthodoxy could adequately respond to the "challenge of the time", therefore, ACOYM branches were opened everywhere in the regions.

In order to optimize the youth mission, the Jubilee Bishops' Council (2000) supported the proposal to establish the Synodal Department for Youth Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. In fact, there was a status and qualitative transformation of the ACOYM into a new church structure of a high level, which, in turn, contributed to the formation of youth departments in dioceses. In addition, the Council approved the "Concept of Orthodox Youth Ministry of the ROC" adopted by the Holy Synod in April 2000 as a fundamental document in this area of activity: "... the young generation should hear from pastors and believers of their peers live and convincing answers to their searches and questions, to find in the Church genuine values and reliable life guidelines, to obtain the necessary conditions for the disclosure of one's inner spiritual and moral potential" (On the Organization of Youth Work in the Russian Orthodox Church 2014). Two years later, the Day of Orthodox

Youth was established, which is celebrated on February 15, on the feast of the Meeting of the Lord.

In the 2000s, the Russian Orthodox Church built the organization of work with youth (Figure 1). The Synodal department coordinates this activity, and while in the existing system there is a lack of institution at the metropolitan level, the main activities are performed by diocesan departments and full-time assistant beneficiaries. This position was introduced in 2010 due to the increased focus on youth work.

Synodal Department for Youth Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate		
↓	↓	↓
Coordination Center for Youth Ministry in the Federal District		
↓	↓	↓
Ruling bishop	↔	Diocesan Department for Youth Affairs
↓	↓	↓
Assistant beneficiary	↔	Staff Responsible for Youth Work in deaenery
↓	↓	↓
Beneficiary	↔	Parish staff member for youth work

**Figure 1.** Organization of work with youth in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Staff members are greatly assisted by specialized councils that function on a voluntary basis as permanent bodies under the youth affairs departments of the dioceses. They are made up of people representing the interests of parish youth clubs, volunteer organizations and public associations.

Informants note that: “There is a division of activity spheres. The department is mainly engaged in secular youth (colleges, universities), the activities of the Council are aimed at the youth of the Church and those who are attracted from outside to the activities of the Council. Formally subordinate to the Diocese’s Youth Affairs Department, our Coordinating Council has a certain degree of autonomy in decision-making. The positive aspects of the work are as follows: (1) the very existence of an organized and motivated youth’s special team, capable of creating the final product—an event, (2) initiatives appear and are implemented from youth and not imposed from leaders, (3) a wide coverage of Orthodox youth during events. Negative aspects of the work are as follows: (1) the problem of updating the composition of the COP with a large number of those who leave it (for example, family formation, getting a job or career progress, losing interest, etc.), (2) lack of continuity: members who have taken part in the work of the CC for several years leave its membership and untrained, inexperienced newcomers remain on the Council, (3) with wide diocesan youth events’ “brand” recognition, there is a problem of low coverage of the events of the Constitutional Court in church and secular media, (4) Orthodox youth’s decrease in interest in some events, (5) lack of special training for work with youth among members of the Constitutional Court” (Sergey, Member of the Coordination Council, 25 years old).

#### 4. Human Resources for Working with Young People

The profession of an assistant beneficiary for youth work in a parish involves communication and interaction with people. Success of such work necessitates the ability to establish and maintain contacts with people, activity, sociability, developed lexical abilities, verbal thinking and emotional stability. Most certainly, the profession of youth work organizer is of heuristic character.

Of course, the profession of youth work organizer belongs to the class of heuristic ones. It involves professional activities that are related to analysis, research, planning, control and management of other people. This specialty also involves influencing young people



in order to improve their social, creative and cognitive abilities, and improve their living conditions. It requires a specialist of high erudition and originality of thinking, striving for development and e-learning.

To eliminate the shortage of such employees, the diocese began to organize schools and training courses for assistant beneficiaries in working with youth. For example, in 2010–2015, the youth department of the Diocese provided classes (4–6 h) on weekends three to four times a month (Table 1). On the recommendations of the beneficiaries, students were sent to tuition-free education. They underwent practical training and prepared practice-oriented graduation theses on the basis of their churches. Not everyone who started to study completed the courses. Most of them were hampered by life circumstances: family responsibilities, difficulties in traveling to the diocesan center, employment at the main place of work, etc. As a result, 67 people were trained (45 women and 22 men).

**Table 1.** Sample curriculum short training courses for Staff Assistant Rector (deanery) at youth ministry (hours).

<b>№</b>	<b>Cycle, Theme</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>In-Class Work</b>	<b>Self-Study</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>1 Cycle “Orthodox Theology” Basic part</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Module “Christian Scriptures”</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1.1	The Holy Scriptures	4	2	2
1.1.2	Sacred scriptures	8	4	4
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Module the Creed</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
1.2.1	Orthodox Creed	8	4	4
1.2.2	Comparative theology	4	2	2
1.2.3	Moral theology and asceticism	4	2	2
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Module “Liturgics”</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
1.3.1	Introduction to the liturgical tradition	8	4	4
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Church History Module</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
1.4.1	History of the ancient Church	4	2	2
1.4.2	History of the Russian Orthodox Church	8	4	4
1.4.3	Canon law	4	2	2
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Module Church literature and art</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
1.5.1	Patristic writing	4	2	2
1.5.2	Church art	4	2	2
1.5.3	Church Slavonic language	4	2	2
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Module Non-Christian religions</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
	History of non-Christian religions	4	2	2
	New religious movements	4	2	2
	Cycle certification	18	0	18
<b>2</b>	<b>Cycle “Working with youth”. Basic part</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Module “Theoretical training”</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
2.1.1	Fundamentals, Forms and Methods of Youth Ministry	8	4	4
2.1.2	Project Management Fundamentals	8	4	4
2.1.3	Orthodox pedagogy	8	4	4
2.1.4	Youth Missionary Service	8	4	4

Table 1. Cont.

№	Cycle, Theme	Total	In-Class Work	Self-Study
2.1.5	Social work with youth	8	4	4
2.1.6	Organization of creative, cultural and educational projects	8	4	4
2.1.7	Information support and provision of youth work	8	4	4
	Practical training	36	36	0
<b>2.2</b>	<b>The elective part of the program</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
2.2.1	Fundamentals of Catechesis	8	4	4
2.2.2	Experience of organizing youth ministry in the Archdiocese	8	4	4
	Graduation thesis	36		36
	Certification throughout the program	18	0	18
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>144</b>

Lectures and practical classes were conducted by the employees of the department, clergymen and university professors. It was their gratuitous contribution to the students' training. As our informants note: *"These courses were very useful for me. I am a social worker. I know a lot about what social work is. But, I did not know anything about the doctrine, about missionary service, about how to work with Orthodox youth. Now I am everything. I will apply knowledge in practice"* (Grigory, department employee, 36 years old). *"Firstly, it is always necessary to justify our activities for a Christian. Such a justification for an Orthodox person is always a patristic heritage and is associated with three "whales" on which all spiritual life is built: prudence, sobriety and abstinence, that is, the categories of meaning, adequacy and measure. Secondly, the main question is what drives us, and on what basis we make (should make) a choice in favor of an active life position—social service (volunteer activity). There is only one answer—everything that a Christian does—cannot but proceed from love. Thirdly, it would be fair to ask how to achieve this love and what is the main thing by it? The motive of our social activity is a sacrificial attitude towards the world, and the desire for redemption for it"* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). *"Knowledge of religious foundations by itself does not give a worldview effect, does not overcome the contradictory nature of the worldview. And, therefore, they do not become the basis of human life. This implies the following: knowledge is only one, albeit very important, element of influence on the worldview. The form is clear here—this is an educational process. The second component of such influence is the creation of conditions for the work of human consciousness and freedom of thought. These are such types of communication as discussion, dialogue, exchange of views and defense of one's own position. Possible forms of implementation are as follows: thematic clubs, games, competitions, round tables, seminars, Internet forums, etc."* (Ivan, department employee, 45 years old).

## 5. Basic Forms of Youth Work

The division of basic forms of youth work was made in accordance with the documents of the ROC—the Concept of Youth Ministry of the ROC (2000), On the Organization of Youth Work of the ROC (2011) and regulations on the procedure for the implementation of programs for the training of specialists in the field of catechetical, missionary, youth and social activities (2013). We divided basic forms of youth work into the three following types: traditional church forms of work with youth, traditional secular forms and innovative ones.

### 5.1. Traditional Church Forms of Youth Work

The traditional church forms of work with youth include the creation of groups of the Holy Scriptures study, doctrinal talks, meetings with the clergy, etc. Let us consider some of them.

#### a Conversations and meetings with the clergy and specially invited guests.

Following the example of the Roman pontiffs, Patriarch Kirill began to hold large-scale meetings with young people. Thus, in 2009, addressing the young people of Nizhny Novgorod, he said that he was glad to meet with the largest number of people, see their faces, hear their questions and, first of all, understand what they live with ([Book of Reflections of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill 2009](#)). However, gradually, this initiative came to a halt, which is explained by a number of reasons, such as a decrease in the level of religiosity of young Russians, a decline in the authority of the ROC and its primate in the eyes of society, ineffectiveness of media policy, etc.

At the grassroots level, the communication of the clergy with the congregates takes place quite regularly and with benefits for both:

*"I will give examples of questions asked by young students at meetings with a priest: How will the ROC help its fellow believers—Orthodox Christians in Africa, and will Orthodoxy spread in other countries? How can you atone the worst sins? What is the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church to contemporary art? Is Christianity a religion for the weak? What is the meaning of life and is there any? Do you agree with the statement that in the modern world people begin to believe in God only when they are left alone? How do you feel about a civil marriage? Will a wedding save you from divorce? Why do some monks sleep in coffins?" (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). The research has shown that the variety of questions testifies not only to the ignorance and naivety of the students, but also to the inquisitiveness of the mind and the intense spiritual search of youth.*

Our research has determined the purpose of pastoral conversations with working youth: *"The purpose of pastoral conversations with working youth is to form a Christian worldview and an active Christian position in the surrounding world. The goal is achieved by studying modern concepts of the Church: such as social, missionary and youth's ones. Each parishioner has the opportunity to ask his/her questions to the priest and expand his/her knowledge through regular conversations with parishioners in the Sunday school for adults" (Dmitry, priest, 38 years old).*

#### b Doctrine (catechism) classes.

The diocese has an institute for parish counseling. A priest's assistant on duty in the church does not only answer the questions of the parishioners, but also gives them advice and invites them to catechesis. Our informants talk about the role of catechesis for young people: *"Catechesis, as opposed to catechism, is a harmonious system of teaching biblical truths and revelations with a set of clear principles and a strict hierarchy" (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). "The whole life of a Christian is built on three foundations—dogma, morality and asceticism. He/she must have the knowledge of Revelation and Truth, the Gospel, have knowledge about God and about man, accept for himself/herself a certain moral code of life and behavior. He/she has to learn all this. Taking Baptism is preceded by confession, as the fruit of penitential labors that arose in the process of catechesis. At the same time, a person must not only confess his/her sins, but also express a desire to change his/her life, for example, to register a marriage if he lives in a so-called "civil" marriage. We do not need to be ashamed of preaching—we preach not our own, we have someone to lead people to—to Christ, to His Church and His Chalice, the main Sacrament of Orthodoxy. We cannot and should not be silent about this" (Mikhail, archpriest, 43 years old). "Our announcement system is multi-level and multi-format. It includes both group lessons and individual interviews, meaningful activities, that is, education of the mind, home prayer rules and church services. This is a capacious, extensive system that requires a certain effort from a person and a desire to do something. All sins are spoken out during conversations. There were times when a person went through all 12 conversations, but did not change his life. Then this individual conversation was simply a barrier for him. A person was faced with the fact of inner reality that he heard, but did not fulfill it" (Daniil, priest, 46 years old).*



### c Scripture study groups.

Our study has found that one of the traditional church forms of youth work is the creation of groups to study the Holy Scriptures. In the department staff's opinion, the Socratic dialogue has proven itself well in the process of studying sacred texts. Our informants note: *"When studying the Holy Scriptures, it is better to use Socratic dialogue in order to induce a young person to self-determination and thinking over vital issues. This method does not act edifying, but imperceptibly and gradually. Under the guidance of a mentor, young people pose questions and seek answers to them. However, this method may not always be used. Socratic dialogue cannot begin in an atmosphere of rejection and alienation of the interlocutors. There should be trust and striving for mutual understanding between a priest and young people"* (Vladislav, department employee, 54 years old). From a functional point of view, such meetings are necessary not only for catechesis, but also for increasing the level of solidarity among youth: *"Gospel readings are basic meetings that have been held on Thursdays from 19.00 to 21.00 for several years, during said time we tried to solve the ideological and doctrinal issues that arise before every neophyte. Also, these meetings were of an organizational nature, anyone who attended them knew that they could come and meet friends, as well as make an announcement, ask for help; with the help of the regularity of these meetings, the youth felt a sense of belonging to the experience of the whole Church"* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). The informants' experience first of all indicates that the student youth should be included in the study groups of the Holy Scriptures: *"Gospel readings are conversations conducted for young students, first of all, university students. Through conversations, young people find answers to their life questions and learn to relate their lives to the gospel. Then the youth are introduced into the church community and continue to study Christianity through ministry. In the future, young people have the opportunity to expand their knowledge in a theological circle. The purpose of the theological circle is to develop theological thinking among young people. During the conversations, young people not only get acquainted with the truths of the Christian faith, but also learn to apply the knowledge gained in their lives, be it worship, temple activities, or life outside the temple"* (Dmitry, priest, 38 years old).

### d Missionary activity.

In the Soviet period, missionary work was actually banned, thus, the ROC has been reviving this type of activity in recent years and accumulating the necessary experience. *"In missionary work it's important to get short-term results but it is also important to become a strategist. You can drag a person to church, persuade, say: 'Let's go, let's see, it's good there'. 'Yes, we are good, we like it, but it is not at all a fact, that our neighbor will like it all too'. 'There are miracles, of course, but from experience I will say: one percent of a hundred that brought his neighbor, and he suddenly liked it. On the contrary, I think, according to the Providence of the Lord, it is often so arranged for our salvation that our loved ones do not come to church for as long as possible. But if we are prudent, long-suffering and treat our neighbor with love, then sooner or later our loved ones will come to the Church and will be saved in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the most important thing"* (Nikolaiy, priest, 54 years, old). Our informants' speculations indicate that representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church are aware of the complex nature of missionary work and the multi-stage nature of this process: *"The Gospel says: So let your light shine before people, so that they see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father. Therefore, it is necessary to make the life of our loved ones easier after they come to church."* *"This is missionary activity"* (Victor, archpriest, 47 years old).

## 5.2. Traditional Secular Forms

Our research has found out that the ROC actively uses the methods and forms of work with the younger generation, common in the practice of youth and educational institutions, such as children's and youth Orthodox forums and camps, social projects, initiation of youth public associations, cultural and sports events, etc.

### a Social projects.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church actively include young people in the implementation of various social projects aimed at both the restoration of churches and the development of the personality of a young person. *“The ‘Volunteer’ program is the participation of young people in the preparation and implementation of social projects, both of the Department and public organizations with which the Department cooperates. Under the guidance of specialists, young people participate in the development, planning and implementation of project activities. The program, based on the natural feeling of a young person, will assert himself/herself in society, introduces him/her into relationships with adults from various spheres of social life and professions so that through direct example he will acquire certain skills necessary for a future profession. The ‘Start in life’ program is aimed at helping adolescents in their personal development and consists of lessons on the scout method, the purpose of which is to instill in adolescents the skills of dormitory, group interaction, experience of responsibility and goal achievement”* (Ivan, department employee, 45 years old). *“Participation in the life of the church, its worship and social tasks that face the parish prompted the youth of our club to take responsibility for certain key problems. First of all, it is organizing and putting things in order in the church before big holidays and solving organizational problems on the holidays themselves. The main task of the parish priest is to show each parishioner that his/her church is his/her home, and just as a man is a zealous owner in his/her house, he/she must also feel and be aware of himself/herself in the church. An example of such an attitude of young people was the renovation by the youth in the upper limit of the temple, which we began to call the ‘Father’s Land’ project—the restoration of the destroyed temple. The next task of the development of the ‘Father’s Land’ project is to draw up a plan of destroyed and desecrated places in our diocese and draw public attention to these problems. The beginning of this project was laid when, rafting down the Chusovaya River, in the village of Kyn, together with the inhabitants of the village, we organized and put things in order in the church, which had been in disrepair and desecrated for a long time, after joint prayer and meeting the inhabitants of the village, we had hope that something should get off the ground in this village”* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). *“It seems to me that only actions can change a person. But even if I do nothing, if I live in such a way that life does not send me the necessary situations where I could express myself, this does not speak of my faith. I can sin, but I can sin as a believer, because the concept of sin fits into my faith. Lack of action speaks of a lack of love as a driving force. Then I’m a believer, but a rotten believer. That is why faith without doings is dead”* (Nikita, department employee, 33 years old).

#### b Youth camps (Scout camps).

Scout camps are not a new phenomenon in Russian history. In summer of 1915, the first scout camp was organized near Petrograd. In the same year, similar organizations for girls appeared. In 1915, the First All-Russian Congress of Scouts was held. In 1923, scouting was officially banned in Russia. Today, the ROC is actively resuming the work of scout camps. Our informants note: *“One summer we organized a scouting detachment in Kungurka. Several non-church guys got there. By the end of the shift, they were already baptized together with everyone, got up to the prayer rule, one wanted to confess and receive communion. That is, there is no need to worry about the fact that there is this adolescent craving for activity. He still treats everything superficially, he simply cannot treat otherwise, because his questions about the meaning of life are not yet ripe for him, first of all, he is interested in doing something”* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old).

*“In 2009, the organization ‘Druzhina Sveta’ was created. Its main goal is the development of the children’s and adolescent’s movement in the Diocese. It is a kind of methodological coordination center, helping to create and interact with scouting, volunteer, intelligence and other teenage squads. The first such detachment was ‘Dawn’, created under the Youth Department of the Diocese. Scouting is Christianity in action, that is active Christianity. Scouting is full only when all its elements are present, such as nature living and in accordance with nature, link system, interaction with elders, a system of ranks, traditions and symbols. As a result, an environment is created in which children can communicate, self-actualize in some kind of creative, non-destructive activity. In scout camps, teenagers learn forest survival skills. The child learns responsibility and can really prove himself: make a fire, cook food. But the goal is, first of all, for children to learn to overcome*

*difficulties as such, to interact in a group, to resolve conflicts and difficulties. The Christian spirit is principled when children communicate"* (Vladimir, department employee, 28 years old).

c Intellectual leisure.

The ROC is not only a spiritual component of life, but also actively influences the daily life of young people. The person is the main subject to whom the socio-cultural activities of the religious organization are directed. The church, using various techniques, such as games, disputes, etc., addresses youth's values and attitudes, forms a sense of life and motivates a person to certain actions. Our informants note: *"As more and more young people attended the Gospel readings, they did not cope with the task of motivating a person to study and assimilate the Bible and the patristic tradition, the general stagnation of our club youth life became noticeable, and the intellectual game "Know the Truth" was developed to diversify it. The experience of conducting the game turned out to be so successful that, having adapted it to a more secular content, we were able to start a program of intellectual leisure among secular youth, motivating them not just to study the Bible and the Gospel (for most of them it is too early), but to study and comprehend history and culture of Russia. In parallel with the game, discussions were organized on worldview topics: "Worldview of modern youth: chaos or hope", "Orthodoxy and secular society—points of contact", "Does faith in God interfere with success in life" and others"* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old).

*"The evidence that our project is in demand is that it received a presidential grant in 2014. The project is aimed at the intellectual, cultural, spiritual and moral development of student youth, through acquaintance with the history of Russia and Orthodox culture through the multimedia, interactive, team game "Know the Truth", performed on a modern computer platform. In several dozen of educational institutions of the Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk regions, the Perm Territory, a series of team games have been already held, which made it possible to attract the maximum number of young students to get acquainted with the historical and cultural heritage of Russia. In addition, teachers of educational institutions took part in the project, which stimulates their further work referring to the spiritual and moral education of the young generation of the Greater Urals' regions"* (Pavel, department employee, 38 years old).

*"A cinema club is, first of all, a communication environment in which it was possible to communicate on the main moral themes expressed in contemporary world cinematography. Films were selected by themes. As a matter of principle, we tried not to impose the Orthodox view when condemning problems, so the film club became a missionary platform where meetings of church and secular youth could take place in a relaxed and informal manner"* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old).

d Cultural events.

The ROC organizes youth's cultural and leisure activities. The main purpose of these cultural and leisure activities is to give young people the opportunity to show and develop their talents, as well as to become a place of communication and self-organization of youth on the basis of festival programs. *"We call all projects a Cultural Mission. The meaning of the mission is targeted at the formation of cultural people or culture-bearers which are not many at present. The major quality of a human being as a culture-bearer is a perception: I belong to such and such cultural group, I identify myself with such and such community, with the orthodox community in the given case. The most important for the young people is to rank oneself among a certain group. But if there is a lack of adaptive mechanisms that would allow him/her to enter the Orthodox culture, the young man will look for another group with which he/she could identify himself/herself. Hence, there are so many youth subcultures and anti-cultures. We should create such programs, projects, or, better to say, such an environment, such a life that it would be easy for a young person to relate to the Church. If we find such mechanisms, then we will win the cultural war that is going on today"* (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old).

*"When organizing a parish youth club, one should remember what the goal is and what the means are. The youth club is a means for creating a church environment. If its leisure activity becomes an end in itself, then it simply turns into a form of organizing leisure time for young people and ceases to be a way of involving a young person in the Church"* (Dmitry, priest, 38 years old).

*“The Candlemass Day is one of the most massive events in the diocese for young people. It includes classical dances (waltz, polonaise, cotillion) and promotes the communication of young people and their study of culture. This form of cultural pastime is a healthy alternative to discos. Many participants later say that it was at this event that they met their future spouse. Secular people often come to the Candlemass Day—Cossacks and representatives of various public organizations. The theme of the ball (for example, “The Edge of Love”) often becomes the keynote of the entire festival. The annually increasing number of participants (about 150 people) entails the problem of their accommodation: the conference room in the building of the Spiritual and Educational Center of the Diocese, due to its relatively small size, does not allow expanding the circle of its participants. Girls and boys are increasingly acting as organizers of the festival. Thus, in the social network *vkontakte.ru*, information about all its events is published in advance, including the fact that applications for creative evenings, including songs, poems, staging numbers, are accepted. The theme repeats the keynote of the entire festival, but sometimes participants come up with an initiative to expand its framework. Another mass event is the Evening Party. It includes Russian folk dances and games. Folk festivities are taken as a basis. Unlike the Candlemass Day, the party does not require any participants’ special training; all the “secrets” are revealed during the event” (Sergey, Member of the Coordination Council, 25 years old).*

e     Addiction prevention projects.

The Russian Orthodox Church seeks to prevent the deviant behavior of young people. *“Today, more than ever, a clear voice of the Christian word about man is needed, about the truth to which the quiet Divine voice calls youth. It is important for us not to taste any drugs, under any sauce, to be vigorous and vigilant, not to miss a person who is looking for meaning, but cannot find it” (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old). Observing the law, according to which teachers of state and non-state educational organizations are prohibited from using educational activities for religious agitation, the Diocese organizes educational competitions that promote the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.*

*“Since the 2010s, on the initiative of the diocese, the project “Competition of smoking-free classes” has been implemented, then it “grew” into the project “Be healthy”. Pupils of the 7th, 8th and 9th grades are invited to participate in competitions and some kind of sports or creative events, invented by the organizing committee, throughout the year. They receive points throughout the year, based on the results of which the winner is determined at the end. At the same time, it is the school group as a unit that participates in competitions, which for this undertakes to be a non-smoker. It is clear that there are smoking children in classes, but the point of the action is that the children set themselves a directive to cope with this problem at least by the end of the year, largely due to the involvement of children in active creative activity. For example, sports competitions “Autumn starts”, in which schoolchildren show their skills in pulling up on the bar, tug-of-war, long jump and so on. Schoolchildren demonstrate the values of a healthy lifestyle in skits and mini-performances, and also reflect them in feuilletons, fairy tales and poems. In the “Ivan da Maria” competition, the school group presents a video on the topic of family values for consideration by the jury” (Konstantin, department employee, 31 years old).*

*“The “Ladya program” of primary addictions prevention among young people has been developed at the National Scientific Center for Addiction Treatment “Roszdrazh” by order of the Russian Orthodox Church and is being implemented in the Chelyabinsk and Sverdlovsk regions. It is based on Orthodox spiritual values, but expresses them in a secular language. The core of the program is largely composed of quibbles, examples, comparisons and trainings. For example, participants are asked to compose an ad to find a friend, and then predict which ad was the most popular and why. The program is aimed at making the teenager learn to think, moreover, mainly about moral values, and make a choice on his/her own” (Nikita, employee of the department, 33 years old).*

f     Sports and military-patriotic clubs.

Sports and patriotic education is a multifaceted and purposeful activity of the ROC. Its goal is the development of civic consciousness and patriotism among young people as the most important spiritual, socially significant personal values, and the development of high

working capacity. *“The ‘Russian Dynamometer’ is a sports multidiscipline event, which includes 11 exercises on the horizontal bar of varying degrees of difficulty, for the performance of which a certain number of points is assigned within one minute. The ‘Russian Dynamometer’ system was created by specialists from the sports and patriotic department of the diocese and the ‘Russian Dynamometer’ sports club in 2012 based on multiple years’ experience of holding competitions among schoolchildren. The idea to combine 11 exercises on the horizontal bar into a system and assign points to them was born in one of the churches in the process of discussing the development of sports and patriotic ministry in the Russian Orthodox Church. ‘Russian Dynamometer’ is held in schools, secondary and higher educational institutions, in military units and correctional colonies in many regions of Russia” (Aleksey, archpriest, 44 years old).*

*“The military-patriotic club ‘Druzhdina’ was founded in 2010, and its main specificity is working with teenagers in the field of martial arts, hand-to-hand combat with its spiritual practice of the Russian Orthodox Church and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, a harmonious personality develops and grows. During classes, not only the development of the physical activity of a person is put on, but the development of his spirit, the development of personality, personal qualities, and children grow up harmonious. When we work with children, with adolescents, the first task is to educate a highly spiritual personality. And in the military-patriotic club ‘Druzhdina’ this goal is being realized. And the guys grow up strong both in spirit and in body. When I talked with the guys, instructed them, I wanted them not only to strive to be strong in body, but also in soul and spirit. From the very foundation of the club, its wise leader has tried to act not by himself, but in harmony with the Church. He invites priests to communicate with the children, and in some difficult moments this helps to find a way out of difficult teenage situations, from difficult life twists and turns” (Dmitry, priest, 38 years old).*

#### g Young family club.

Family policy is one of the priority areas of the ROC activity. The task of the Russian Church is to teach people to live in peace with God and with each other, to create a family.

*“The organization of joint tours, rafting and pilgrimages, which led to closer and head-to-head communication apart from educational aspect (each tour had its own theme), people made friends and thanks to that Christian marriages and families were emerged” (Aleksey, Archpriest, 44 years old).*

*“Youth is a short period of time that is given to a person as the most fruitful and productive stage of his/her formation and development, when a person can do a lot for himself/herself and attract a resource from outside to build his future life. There is a place in the Church, both for personal spiritual life and for communal life, in which people can actually realize what they receive in the teaching of Christ, that is, the opportunity to do good deeds, have fellowship with each other in love, and the like” (Ivan, employee of the department, 45 years old).*

### 5.3. Innovative Forms of Work with Youth

#### a Church and Internet.

The expansion of the information space has made significant changes in everyday communication. The ROC, responding to the challenges of the time, recommends that clergymen could be able to actively but carefully use official websites and social networks to communicate with their flock. *“Today we began to actively use the Internet. Thanks to the Internet, we have the opportunity to widely inform young people—Internet users—about the most important news of church life, the activities of the Holy Synod, about external church relations, the development of church–state and church–public relations, about the events of diocesan life, etc. Using the Internet, you can attract young people to the church” (Mikhail, archpriest, 43 years old).*

*“We use the Internet among young people when organizing specialized assistance to young people who have found themselves in difficult life situations or various types of addictions (for example, a hotline service, private personal conversations, an Internet forum with the opportunity to ask a question to a catechist or priest, consultations of an Orthodox psychologist, programs for*

*the rehabilitation of victims of alcohol, drug addiction, as well as former members of destructive sects)*" (Boris, employee of the department, 37 years old).

b Work with youth subcultures.

The ROC attempts to make traditional values attractive for young people, demonstrating the harmfulness of adherence to addictions that destroy personality.

*"Today we attempt to work with youth subcultures, role-playing, etc. Subcultures that call adolescents to commit suicide, for example, the Blue Whale, are especially dangerous. They are especially dangerous. They are widespread on the Internet"* (Sergey, Member of the Coordination Council, 25 years old).

*"Youth subcultures are going online today. Many of them are life-threatening. We are obliged to go online and tell young people about the risks they face"* (Konstantin, department employee, 31 years old).

c Organization of Orthodox cafes for young people.

Orthodox cafes began to open in Moscow to work with young people. The Moscow experience was used in other regions of Russia, including Yekaterinburg.

*"A new form of work for us is the organization of youth Orthodox cafes and bars. The first cafe was opened in Moscow in 2003. Today there are 2 such cafes in Yekaterinburg. In addition to tasty and inexpensive food, evenings are held here, for example, "Evening of an Orthodox song", conversations with a priest, etc."* (Nikolaiy, employee of the department, 42 years old).

*"Orthodox cafes and bars are a main form of work with young people. Young people willingly come to them. Here you can communicate with like-minded people, find a wife/husband. Often there are thematic programs such as "Evening of romance", lectures, tea with a priest. All these activities are aimed at the formation of Orthodox values and norms"* (Mikhail, archpriest, 43 years old). In the context of the pandemic, these cafes were closed and are unlikely to resume their work.

## 6. Discussion

The study has shown that one of the main problems in the field of youth work of the ROC is the lack of experienced trained staff for their functions' implementation. This is due to the previous Soviet period of history. The results of our research are confirmed by the conclusions of both representatives of the ROC itself (Patriarch and Youth . . . 2009; [Pelín and Grigoriev 2011](#)) and secular scientists ([Mitrokhin 2006](#) etc.).

Our research, based on informants' opinion, has identified three groups of attracting and retaining the youth's forms of the ROC in Orthodoxy. The first group is the traditional church form. The form includes traditional preaching during services, educational activities (organizing groups for the study of the Holy Scriptures, doctrinal (catechism) classes) and missionary activities, etc. Most often, the conservative part of the clergy is oriented towards the use of traditional methods and means. This is evidenced by the speeches of some hierarchs ([Archbishop of Kostroma and Galich Alexander 2007](#)).

The second group presents traditional secular forms. The ROC actively uses the methods and forms of work with the young generation, common in the practice of youth and educational institutions, such as children's and youth's camps, young family clubs, sports and military-patriotic clubs, addiction prevention and social projects, etc. Thus, Patriarch Kirill motivates his flock to systematically use the secular experience of working with young people ([Book of Reflections of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill 2009](#)). We can agree with the point of view of O.A. Bogatova, E.I. Dolgaeva, A.V. Mitrofanova, that "Orthodox activists who take part in volunteer activities in organizing charitable events influence others by personal example, demonstrating their role model of active and responsible social behavior, which consists in helping those who need it" ([Bogatova et al. 2019](#), p. 500).

The third group refers to innovative forms of work with youth. The concept of innovativeness is used rather conditionally, nevertheless, its use makes it possible to refer to the third group such methods that are almost completely inconsistent with the generally accepted perception of the ROC. Firstly, the creation of special non-government organizations in which youths' everyday practices and the value-normative model of



Orthodoxy are synthesized (Internet projects, Internet communities, Orthodox forums, etc.). Such organizations are artificially introduced into the most destructive and poorly controlled “zones” of the life of the younger generation (Pelin and Grigoriev 2011). The most striking project of recent years is the promotion of the idea of creating a network of Orthodox cafes, bars and nightclubs for young people in the regions of the country. Secondly, work with youth subcultures. First of all, we are talking about pseudo-religious subcultures, which can be attributed today, for example, to the movement of “role-playing”. In addition, within the church organization, work with the subcultures of rollers, skaters and bikers is actively promoted, especially with those that call on young people to commit suicide, for example, the Blue Whale.

## 7. Conclusions

As mentioned above, the basis of “religious transformation” is the idea of open boundaries between religious and secular and mixing them at different levels (society as a whole, institutions and individuals). Our research has revealed that religious phenomena and manifestations of religiosity are observed in totally different areas, such as cultural, economic, educational, leisure, etc. The study has elucidated that the work of the ROC fits into the framework of this paradigm, thus supporting T. Luckmann’s theory.

The study has revealed that over the three decades of the existence of post-Soviet Russia, the following changes have taken place in the organization of work with the youth of the ROC:

First, the structure of church administration of this activity was formalized, taking into account the establishment of federal districts in the country as a kind of administrative-territorial units (since 2000).

Second, specialized departments of dioceses play a leading role in direct work with the younger generation of Russians.

Third, the current leadership of the ROC (since 2009) pays much attention to the professional training of staff members of religious organizations to work with youth.

Fourth, strengthening the churching of young parishioners is seen as the main direction of the ROC’s activities, and this is based on regular meetings with the clergy, catechism classes, the creation of groups for the study of the Holy Scriptures and missionary practice.

Fifth, with the help of Orthodox volunteers, the staff of the youth affairs department strive to activate the scout movement, organize intellectual leisure for girls and boys, sports and military-sports events, etc.

Sixth, with the joint efforts of youth and clergy, social projects are being implemented, such as the prevention of addictions and clubs for young families.

Seventh, among the pressing problems in organizing work with youth in the ROC is the labor turnover in volunteer organizations and mass-media’s insufficient interest in Orthodox youths’ activities.

The authors acknowledge some limitations of the present study that future research could apply. Our research was conducted in the Ural region, one of the largest regions of Russia. The next study should be conducted in several regions of Russia (e.g., South, Central, Northwest) in order to make a comparative analysis of the work of the Russian Orthodox Church with youth in different regions of the Russian Federation

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