

Religious Education in Contemporary Ukraine: a Further Explanation

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This explanatory note relates to my article 'Religious education in contemporary Ukraine: some courses of study analysed', *RSS*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1994, pp. 209–35.

Two month-long field trips to Ukraine (November–December 1993 and September–October 1994) revealed that even among those professionally involved in education there is much confusion about religious education. Indeed, reliable information is hard to come by, and the present situation is characterised by anomalies.

Enquiries carried out since publication of the above-mentioned article in *RSS* reveal that 'religious studies', whether it be in the form of *religiyeznavstvo* or the history of world religions, has become a *compulsory* subject for all humanities students in Ukrainian higher education. This change of status was effected in 1993, when the Ministry of Education of Ukraine sent out two *Letters of Instruction* (*instruktivnyye pis'ma*), dated 19 May and 20 July, obliging institutions of higher education to include religious studies courses in their programmes of study. Point 4 of the July *Letter* reads as follows: 'Taking into consideration the growing interest in religion, a special course on present-day problems of religious studies should be introduced either as a separate subject (at least 30 teaching hours) or as part of a wider course in philosophy.' I was given to understand by one of the deans of study at the Technical Institute in Chernyhyv that failure to comply with these instructions *could* result in the Ministry withholding approval of an institution's overall academic plan and related budget.

Research carried out in October 1994 bears out Professor Anatoli Kolodny's claim that lobbying and pressure from lecturers in higher education were instrumental in making religious studies a compulsory subject. My earlier article does mention that point (p. 226), but states that at the time of writing (February 1994) the Ministry of Education had yet to conclude its deliberations concerning the status of religious studies. This proved not to be the case, as I understood when the issuing of the two *Letters of Instruction* was brought to my attention (in September 1994). Nominally the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations of April 1991 is still in effect, and that law explicitly preserves the principle of the *separation* of religion from the state system of education (see p. 209 of my earlier article).

I take it to be a measure of the confusion surrounding the matter that even a professor in the Humanities Faculty at Ivan Franko University in Lviv was not aware, until I spoke with her, that religious studies had become a compulsory subject for students in her faculty. It looks likely now that the *Letters of Instruction* issued in May and

July 1993 will continue to have the force of law, and that lecturers in the subject will continue to justify it on the basis that some knowledge of religion and of the history of religions forms a significant part of a broad and well-rounded education.