MODERN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN RUSSIA EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to consider the problems of modern theological education in Russia from the standpoint of the feasibility of using the Eastern European experiences and prospects for national development of theological education. The issue of theological education has existed since the first half of the XIIIth century, therefore it is considered in a huge number of literature sources. It cannot go unnoticed that in the recent years more and more publications are devoted to theological education, both in Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space. With every increasing frequency the information emerges about the establishing of new schools offering formal theological education. The article describes the post-secular situation in the Russian society, which today has led consistently to the actualization of the issue of legitimization of Theology in the Russian secular higher education. The article analyses the viewpoints expressed in the panel discussion on Theology in higher education, which was attended by experts on concerned problem. The results of the panel discussion have shown that in a post-secular situation, as well as in the presence of Theology in some secular universities, it is necessary to find certain post-secular 'middle ways', where morality, religious values, and secular freedoms, as well as scientifically grounded virtues will complement each other through Theology.

Keywords: higher education, theological, education, doctrinal, postsecularity

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1. Introduction

The rapid revival of the Church in the last 20-25 years and attempts to find its place in the changing Russian society raised an interesting phenomenon. It covers a wide range of events, starting from the successful cooperation of the Church with other social institutions and ending with the formation of mutual socio psychological phobias.

Today, the forms of real cooperation between the Church and other social institutions that have been lost for many decades are being revived. Such areas of cooperation between the Church and secular institutions surely should include education. Education and Science within the European civilization were originated and developed for a long time in the bosom of the Church, until secular education and research, which did not directly concerned the interests of the Church, had gone beyond the confines of the monasteries and religious schools, having created a secular scientific and educational system. At the same time, the two scientific and educational systems, namely theological and secular, have never been completely separated, have not been autonomous, but have existed to some extent together, especially in large European university centres, where they had common academic professorship and used the same libraries and other educational and scientific areas. In terms of social self-actualization and social guarantees, graduates of theological and secular educational institutions were in equal conditions. Theological and secular educations were comparable and equivalent in terms of employment or transition, say, from theological institution to secular or vice versa [1].

The current debate about theological education is a phenomenon that testifies to the post-secular situation in Russian culture. Researchers state that the emergence of Theology in Russian state universities raises many questions both in the liberal and Orthodox academic communities, and discussions about theological education last for many years. They concern various issues, including "the social demand for theological education; the ways of integrating Theology, traditional for religious organizations, into the system of secular higher education; the introduction of Theology into the nomenclature of scientific specialties of the Higher Attestation Commission" [2].

A.E. Bodrov, the founder and rector of Bible-Theological Institute of Saint Apostle Andrew, back in 2000 spoke of the need to "create a system of theological education at different levels and in various forms, which should include both confessional and secular educational institutions" [3, p. 460].

Protoiereus V. Vorobyev argues that "citizens practicing traditional religions or atheism" in accordance with the Constitution should be given equal opportunities "in the sphere of education, which must be carried out not only on the agnostic-atheistic basis but also on the religious basis" [4, p. 166].

Nevertheless, the proposal to introduce Theology as an academic and scientific specialty into the Russian system of higher education continues to be interpreted in certain academic circles of Russia as clericalism, substitution of Science by mythology incompatible with the secular nature of the state. The

most representative expresser of discontent and defender of the anti-religious concept of rationality was a group of ten Russian academicians, led by two Nobel Prize winners - Vitaly Ginzburg and Zhores Alferov. In 2010 they appealed to the President of the Russian Federation with a request "to stop the expansion of churchmen" into the world of education and Science [5]. Note that this situation is not only a Russian phenomenon, because it characterizes the cultural context on a global scale, indicating the fact that according to J. Schmalzbauer and K. Mahoney, in the recent decades, the era of unconditional domination of secular values and worldview has ended rather unexpectedly. A significant number of people experience an interest in religion in its traditional and non-traditional forms. The religious factor has started to play a significant role in world politics, and influence the economy. The confrontation within cultures on religious grounds, as well as between peoples and civilizations has been drastically intensified [6].

In Russia, the post-secular situation in culture was inherited by the very historical process, in which the democratic transformations that began in the late 80s of the XXth century, abandoned the traditions of the Soviet state atheism as a necessary element. The consequence of this refusal was the construction of a social institution – religion represented in the vast country by both traditional religious denominations and different religious movements and cults, quickly filling the spiritual vacuum, which was formed in the consciousness and subconsciousness of the post-Soviet man, at a time when the former ideological imperatives ceased to dominate [7].

Thus, the situation around Theology at the university causes three types of problems: first, the issue concerning secularism: what does this concept mean, and what does not; secondly, the question of the scientific nature of Theology and the criteria of rationality; and thirdly, the issue concerning the relationship between the authority of the Church, its presence at the university and the freedom of intellectual search, in particular in Theology.

2. Methods

The research objective was to analyse the feasibility of teaching Theology in secular higher education institutions. To achieve this goal, we conducted an expert discussion in the practical part of the study with subsequent statistical processing of the obtained results using the universal statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS).

The expert discussion was attended by experts in the field of Theology, religious studies (18 persons), among them 5 persons were theologians, graduates from theological academies and seminaries, 5 persons represented the Russian Orthodox Church and 8 persons were the religious studies' scholars, graduates from secular educational institutions and university staff. The choice of experts representing various aspects of the teaching of Theology in secular institutions of higher education - the Church, the scientific community, representatives of higher education institutions, subjects of the process - will, in

our opinion, greatly highlight the problematic issues of the appropriateness of teaching Theology in secular universities.

The preliminary discussion concerned the current state of the teaching of Theology in secular universities. Further, a number of questions were posed to the experts, suggesting the choice of several statements concerning the problems of relevance of Theology to Russian society, the problems of introducing Theology into university education, the provision of Theology with educational materials, and the state policy on the teaching of Theology in Russian universities.

3. Results

According to 69% of experts, Theology is in demand by the Russian society, because professionals that are familiar with both ecclesial and secular studies will be able to correctly and accurately articulate the religious attitude on issues related to socio-political issues. It is also extremely important that they promote this attitude in the sphere of secular knowledge, among university intellectuals, acting as intermediaries between religious and secular communities, which today have increasing conflicts in the society. Also, they argue that the state is interested in the removal of social tension, and therefore state institutions should contribute to the provision of quality educational services to those citizens who wish to be competent professionals and would like to acquire both theological and secular knowledge directly in public universities and academies. As confirmed by Ambrose, bishop of Gatchina, this is useful, quite possible, and meets the requirements of the Bologna process [Ambrose, bishop of Gatchina, Ob osnovnyh aspektah funkcionirovaniya teologicheskih fakul'tetov v vuzah Evropy (On the main aspects of the theological faculties functioning at universities in Europe), http://spbda.ru/news/a-17.html Oh].

In addition, as noted by 54% of experts, in modern Russian realities, Theology is necessary first of all to the university itself, because based on a certain communicative ethics, which will be based on respect for the unique human personality. Theology will provide opportunities to consolidate the university community.

So, summing up the opinions of more than half of the experts, we can say that they are convinced that Theology in Russian universities should exist as a creative community of theologians familiar with each other, who are consolidated by communication, who accept the issues of their own faith seriously and are looking for criteria of competence and discipline for their classes. At that, Theology represented in any form, should take not only formal rigor with respect to the subject, method, etc., but also what can be called a system of responsibility. In Theology, this system of responsibility is expanded, because it responds not only to the scientific community or society, but also to the Church to which theologian belongs. Thus, theologians will be able to turn the university environment into a community of people who agree to conduct a reasoned conversation by certain rules of communicative rationality.

However, 31% of experts pointed to some problems with the widespread implementation of Theology in university education. Thus, according to them, it is not clear what university theology should be in its essence. What is the general level of students' knowledge in theological issues that should be provided by theological curricula and training courses?

Also, 46% of experts noted that Theology in Russia still need fundamental textbooks, curricula, and specialized academic councils, without which its institutionalization is impossible. Another 23% of the experts noted that inconsistent government policy with respect to Theology suggested that its purpose consisted in the implementation into modern secular education of certain ideologemes, which could partially fill the gaps of lack of ideological control of public consciousness. Also, 31% of experts pointed out that secular education should not be a mean of transfer of spiritual inspiration. It is intended to provide practical knowledge and comprehensive information. Secular education should contribute to formation of skills of the intellectual analysis of the acquired experience, structuring the acquired knowledge, ordering the worldview, etc.

Thus, presenting the results of the expert discussion, we come to the conclusion that in the conditions, where the post-secular situation reigns in the Russian culture, which is characterized by the discussion under consideration about 'Theology at the university' as well as the fact that the specialty of 'Theology' is already being taught in 32 secular universities (according to the portal Study.ru), the academic and theological communities are faced to the question as to what kind of theological knowledge should be taught in the universities, and what task should be solved: interconnecting the disparate faculties, Science, the Church, and the society through the communication, or teaching scholars and students to theological discipline and morality.

4. Discussion

4.1. Russian experience in theological education

In Russia, unlike Europe, universities were deprived of the experience of communicating with the institute of Church from the very beginning. There never was a theological faculty in Russian university [8]. Theological education was carried out exclusively in the network of seminaries and theological academies. And even when Archbishop Dimitry (Kovalnitsky), the head of Kiev Theological Academy, and Anthony (Khrapovitsky), Bishop of Volyn and Zhytomyr, in 1905, proposed the radical reform of the higher theological school and the creation alongside with the theological academies of "Orthodox faculties". university theological Their initiative came misunderstanding of secular professors and students. Moreover, "at the time when the question of theological faculties was actively discussed in the press, the Commission for the development of a new university statute on January 22,

1906, called for the abolition of Theology departments of universities", referring to the "freedom of conscience" declared by the 1905 Manifesto [9, p. 116].

Subsequently, in the process of separation of the Church from the state, and schools from the Church, secular and religious education systems began to move apart even more. This was facilitated by the general process of differentiation in the scientific and educational spheres, according to which religious education and Theology were inevitably divided, although in these conditions the Church was able to create and retain under its patronage a significant network of secular educational institutions of different levels.

The revolutionary events that began in 1917 interrupted the cooperation of the secular and religious scientific and educational systems in Russia. Certain reproduction of the activities of the religious educational institutions in the Soviet times did not meet even the extremely minimized needs of the Church, and the issues of training the clergy personnel were handled individually through the mechanisms of religious enlightenment.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation in Russia drastically changed. Today, religious organizations can become founders of higher education institutions with the right to undergo accreditation procedures and issue state-recognized diplomas. One of the consequences of this situation was the creation of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University, an Orthodox counterpart of the Catholic universities of the West [10].

In 2002, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation approved a polyconfessional educational standard in the specialty 'Theology'. This standard provides for the possibility of educational training for specialists in Theology on three profiles: Christian, Islamic and Jewish theology.

According to metropolitan bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev), the head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate: "Theology [the secular science] and theology [in Russian – bogoslovie – the subject taught in religious schools] are the same, but by creating a system of theology in the secular educational space, we chose this at the same time Latin and Greek name for the science in order to distinguish it from the theology taught in religious schools, in which future clergymen are trained. In our country, there are Orthodox religious educational institutions, and the Islamic ones and others confessions also have their own educational institutions. But the theology that we are developing as a science in secular educational space is not called upon to prepare 'ministers of worship'. It is designed to give people knowledge about religions, about religious traditions, about the history of religions. Moreover, theology is not the same as religious studies, because theology studies religious phenomena in comparison - for example, there is Orthodox theology, and there is Islamic theology. We study the history of various teachings. It really is a science that requires the same scientific competence as other scientific branches." [I. Bekshaev, Trudnoe otlichie teologii ot religiovedeniya (Difficult difference between theology and religiology), REGNUM News Agency, 2016, retrieved 17.09.2016 from https://regnum.ru/ news/2180841.html]

4.2. European experience in theological education

It is our opinion that the main task of theological educational institutions should be the educational function of future ecclesiastics. And here it is necessary to pay attention to theological education practices in the European countries. It is known that in the vast majority of European countries, the theological faculties are functioning at state universities for centuries. In this connection, we would like to draw attention to the experience of the Orthodox theology faculties in Eastern and Southern Europe.

Countries such as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, when solving the problem of training qualified personnel in the field of theological science, established theological faculties in state universities.

Since the early 1990s, all the local Orthodox Churches in Europe have also trained specialists in various fields of theological science within the framework of state universities. Diplomas of higher education, as well as scientific degrees awarded by the faculty of theology, are recognized by the state. The presence of theological faculties at state universities is considered to be an essential feature of the European educational tradition. And the attempts to separate theological education from university are perceived in Europe as an attribute of communist totalitarian regimes. We would like to emphasize that this is not perceived as a violation of the constitutional principle of separation of the Church and state.

As an example, consider the Orthodox Theological Faculty at University of Presov in Slovakia, the history of which begins since 1948 when a Seminary for the education of priests was founded in the city of Karlovy Vary. The following year it was moved to Prague, and on June 14th 1950 the Orthodox Theological Faculty was established in Presov by order of the government, by virtue whereof the Seminary was also moved to Presov. The place for the establishment of the faculty was not chosen by chance, because Eastern Slovakia was known for its long traditions of Eastern Christianity. In addition, in the same 1950, a Presov Council was held in this city, where it was decided to abolish the Union, and consequently here appeared the largest Orthodox diocese in the Czechoslovakia of those times. In 1990 the faculty became a part of Pavel Josef Shafarik University, while in 1997 it became a part of newly established University in Presov. The faculty has the right to grant positions of assistant professor and professor.

Another example: the Theological Faculty of the University of Southern Bohemia in České Budějovice (Czech Republic), founded on November 8th 1991 (it was established in cooperation with the Catholic diocese of České Budějovice by the Academic Senate of the University of Southern Bohemia founded shortly before that). The faculty continues the traditions of Theological Seminary, which existed in České Budějovice in 1803-1950. The faculty closely cooperates with the České Budějovice Catholic diocese and according to its statute is guided in the educational process and research work by the Catholic Church doctrine. In comparison with the other Czech theological faculties, this theological faculty is

considered to be a modern laypeople-oriented faculty, which does not set the main goal of the education of the new ecclesiastics. The faculty sees to prioritize the education of laypeople in areas related to theological and ethical problems.

In general, theological faculties of secular educational institutions in Eastern and Southern Europe have a high educational level, distinguished academic teaching staff, and excellent libraries. They are engaged in research activities, while many have their own publishing houses and are engaged in translations of theological literature. Due to the academic mobility, academic staff and students are exchanging their experiences. This list can be continued. It should be noted that females are also trained at these theological faculties. To some of them nothing prevents from becoming scientists, teachers of educational institutions, social workers, etc.

However, full copying of European traditions of theological education as it seems to us will be superfluous. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the promotion and development of theological education in Russian universities, accumulating as far as possible all the best practices that are available in the European theological education.

4.3. Prospects of modern theological education in Russia

Considering the prospects of the modern theological education in Russia, we can propose the following scenario of the events.

First of all, theological faculties should become centres of theological science. Therefore, the establishment of theological faculties in secular educational institutions, which have the status of national or state establishments, with assistance and support of Church, seems to us not only the best option for reforming the sphere of theological education, but also the opportunity to significantly improve the quality of education. Student courses of general humanitarian and philosophical inquiry fields, Psychology, Pedagogy, and Sociology could be taught by scientists recognized in their fields, who meet all the requirements of the educational institution. After all, in today's reality, ecclesiastics or just theologians should be highly erudite and have significant encyclopaedic knowledge. A special attention at such faculties should be given to the study of foreign languages, both ancient and modern. It would be desirable that the cycle of theological disciplines were taught by ecclesiastics who had the necessary knowledge, degrees and academic ranks recognized by the state. Naturally, such a model will be most successful in large cities and regional centres where the problems associated with the organization of work, personnel, and material resources are minimal. Both future ecclesiastics and those who simply want to study Theology and get theological education work in the social sphere [Cerkovnyj obrazovatel'nyj standart po podgotovke social'nyh rabotnikov (The theological educational standard in the training of social workers), http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3608630.html] or teachers at general education institutions, men as well as women will be able to become the students of theological faculties on equal terms.

4.3.1. Interaction with theological educational institutions

Especially interesting is the creation and support of theological faculties in those cities, which at the moment possess theological educational institutions of various denominations. They can become a kind of preparatory springboard for those who, while getting education at theological faculties, would like to devote their lives to the Church and become its church ministers. It is here that such students continue to live in accordance with the internal regulations under the guidance of experienced clergy, participate and improve in the worship practice, study other subjects that are not included in the general curricula of the university. Naturally, theological educational institutions should provide all the necessary conditions for spiritual life, prayer, and preparation for ministration, students' scientific work, and university studies.

By reducing the number of students living in theological educational institutions, it would be possible to improve the stay there of future ecclesiastics, thus creating better conditions for prayer and teaching. It is no secret that in recent years the increasing numbers of graduates from theological educational institutions that have received theological education do not devote themselves to serving the Church. At the same time, many of them just want to study Theology, but know in advance that the priestly path is closed to them for one reason or another.

4.3.2. Libraries

Taking into account the creation of electronic catalogues and libraries, a single database for students and teachers will clearly strengthen the positions of Theology. The latest editions of both domestic and foreign authors must be available on the library shelves. Library collections must be constantly replenished at the expense of both Church funds and other sources of income. There should be a universal catalogue of defended Doctoral theses in Theology and divinity, a single database of proposed topics for writing scientific articles and conducting research, including those at the level of master's theses.

4.3.3. Academic mobility

Academic mobility of the students and teachers plays an important role in the development of Science and education. Student exchange during a semester within the same Church is probably the easiest process among all the above. The student will be able to see how other students live. He will be able to show himself, not to mention that he will be able to gain valuable experience and knowledge. The same applies to the exchange of lecturers. The exchange of students and lecturers with foreign educational institutions, both Orthodox and other denominations is quite attractive as well. Here, one of the first problems is the mastery of a foreign language. This problem is easier to solve within the framework of public education. At the same time, the situation in some

theological institutions could have been better. In addition to increasing teaching loads, as it seems to us, extra curricula in foreign language with the university teachers in their spare time would have caused great interest among students. Particular and special attention should be paid to the study and teaching of ancient languages [11].

This also includes holding of international conferences, seminars, symposiums involving the participation of leading experts from both CIS and non-CIS states. It is no secret that today the level of organization of many such events is not satisfactory. Organization of seminars for postgraduates and doctoral students with the world's leading scientists in the field of specialization, the possibility of consultations is a separate item in such a program.

5. Conclusions

Currently, significant advances have been achieved in the introduction of Theology as a secular and scientific specialty. In many Russian universities there have been opened departments and divisions of Theology, a poly-confessional educational standard for the specialty 'Theology' has been approved, and the specialty 'Theology' has been given a separate status allowing to award the degree of candidates and doctors of Theology. At the same time, the secular specialty of 'Theology' should be considered as a humanitarian specialty with a special emphasis on clarifying the role of the Church in the history of civilization, the study of religious philosophy, a significant number of philological disciplines, etc. It is quite obvious that secular specialists in Theology should be trained exclusively at secular higher educational institutions in compliance with all the components of training bachelors and masters.

Today, as known, theological education is not equivalent to secular education in terms of legal and social aspects. Both society and the state recognize the fact that the Church has positive impact on the education of our citizens, the formation of their public morality and other human qualities. Nevertheless, the Church as such is not yet perceived as an institution which in terms of its influence on people is equal to other public institutions, such as school, army, law enforcement system and civil society institutions.

This, first of all, concerns the system of theological education. Therefore, today Russia faces the important challenge of forming its own full-fledged theological education system, which should take into account both Russian historical tradition and foreign experience. The search for the optimal model of interaction between the Church, the state and universities is a creative task for all participants of this process.

The outcomes of the expert discussion have shown that in conditions where the post-secular situation reigns in the Russian culture, as well as the fact that Theology has been already introduced in some secular universities, it is necessary to find certain post-secular 'middle ways', where morality, religious values and secular freedoms, as well as scientific virtues will not contradict, but will complement each other. But yet, it is quite difficult to say, whether the

Russia will search for these pathways. Maybe, further studies of how Theology exists in the context of Western and Russian universities will help understanding this issue, which can become a prospect of further research of post-secularity and its manifestations in the context of different cultures.

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