

## Conference Paper

# Theology at Russian State Universities: Incorporation Problems

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the place of theology in the education program of Russian state university. It is marked that during more than 15 years of theology presence at universities neither clericalism penetrate into the university education nor theology became nonconfessional discipline. It has been defined the causes of the difficulties of theology incorporation into the university education and research system. It is pointed that neither universities nor religious organizations participating in education programs of theology define the specifics of "the university theology". The article defines the specifics and possibilities of theology development at state universities. Transference of the model of theological studies formed at seminaries and ecclesiastical academies to universities where education and research activity have the secular character will not be effective and expedient. The specific feature of the university theology, which determined its possibilities of development, is proposed to be considered through specification of its comparative and analytic character.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of theology was absent at Russian universities and took place at confessional schools exclusively. The first step of theology introduction into state universities was done in 1992, when new education standards of Russia established theology as a discipline of higher school. This act was orientated to International Standard Classification of Education UNESCO which included theology in the list of education disciplines ([3], p. 73). The first education standard of bachelor's program "Theology" was established in 1992 as well. In 1999 master's and specialist's programs "Theology" were established, and Department of theology was included in "Education and Methodical


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Association of Classic Universities” – the council producing recommendations on the education content and organization at state universities. The first education standard of theology defined it as nonconfessional knowledge. However, in 2002 the standard of “nonconfessional theology” was changed into the standard of “polyconfessional theology” which qualified three profiles of theology: the Orthodox, the Muslim and the Judaic. The next standard of 2011 and the actual standard of 2014 added the fourth confessional profile of theology – the Buddhist.

Now theology is taught in 36 Russian cities. The Orthodox theology dominates in the theological education at states universities. It takes place at 42 universities (including 36 states universities) in 33 cities: bachelor’s programs – at 35 universities, specialist’s programs – at 15, master’s programs - at 14; 6 universities provide programs of professional retraining in theology, 7 universities – programs of qualification advance, 9 universities offer theology as an optional discipline for students of different education programs [2].

Theology incorporation has faced some difficulties at state universities. The kinds of these difficulties, the causes of them and possibilities of overcoming will be considered in the article.

## 2. Confessional Theology at Universities: Fear of Clericalism

The most important barrier for introduction of theology into state universities was constructed by fear of clericalism penetration and violation of the constitutional statement for secular education at state schools. This fear was presupposed by three ideas:

1. teaching of theology opens access to universities for missionaries who will propagandize religious ideas among students; it will be the violation of the federal laws and can be a cause of intolerance, since it can form beliefs of confessional superiority, exclusiveness etc.;
2. providing of the education programs “Theology” at state universities is the preparation of the stuff for the Russian Orthodox Church – one of numerous religious organizations in Russia – on account of the federal budget; it contradicts to principles of the state education politics;
3. studying of theology will lead to dissonance in the world-outlook of students, since theology will form the religious world-outlook contradicting the scientific one: creationism and providentialism versus evolutionism, irrationalism and faith

in unknowableness of God and the Divine dispensation versus rationalism and the epistemological optimism, dogmatism versus objectiveness and criticism.

However, no idea is confirmed. Indeed, the teaching of theology opens access to universities for the Orthodox priests and the Muslim clergy (other religions do not participate in the education programs of state universities) who preach exclusiveness of their religions and superiority of the Orthodox or the Muslim values, but they do it exclusively among students-theologians. The overwhelming majority of these students are adults having formed confessional world-outlook, active believers (parishioners). In other words, students-theologians are adherents of the religion superiority and exclusiveness of which are "propagandize" by their teachers. Thus, the ideas of superiority and exclusiveness do not produce intolerance among students through this way.

Therefore, the fears about the formation of the world-outlook dissonance in the consciousness of students through the teaching of theology are groundless as well. The religious world-outlook of students-theologians refers knowledge obtained through the studying of scientific disciplines to the sphere which has nothing to do with relations between the God and people. That is why the scientific knowledge does not contradict to the theological knowledge for these students; it is complimentary to the knowledge of the relations with the Divine sphere. Two kinds of knowledge have to do with different kinds of experience. If a contradiction takes place in the principles (e.g. the theological creationism and the scientific evolutionism), it is decided in favor of the theological principles: the theological doctrines have priority, and the scientific beliefs are considered insufficiently justified hypotheses.

Of course, the young men having the purpose to find answers to their world-outlook searches happen among students who enter universities to study for a degree in theology. However, the amount of them is not large – it is not more than the amount of students coming to study for a degree in philosophy or psychology with the hope to get answers to their existential questions.

The opinion of inadmissibility of preparing of the stuff for the Russian Orthodox Church on account of the federal budget roots from the Soviet past, when education provided the state order for preparing the specialists, who are distributed to state establishments afterwards. Now it is acknowledged the state education system satisfies requirements of all social institutions, and the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest of them. This case demonstrates that the employment of theologians is no different from the employment of any other students, for example, students-linguists who get employment in non-state translation offices and tourist organizations.

### 3. Development of University Theology: The Causes of Deceleration

So, nothing hinders presence of theology at state universities, but nothing promotes its development. Hundreds of students of state universities have obtained the diplomas of bachelor or master of theology. It is possible for postgraduate and Th.D. programs to take place at state universities before long, since possibility to confer doctorate of theology have appeared in 2016, when Ministry of education have established statements allowing to find dissertation councils for theology. The first council of theses defenses for Th.D. and advanced degrees of theology was founded on the base of four education establishments, two of which are confessional (Ss. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Post-graduate and Doctoral Studies, Moscow Patriarchate and St. Tikhon's Orthodox University) and two – the state one (Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administrations). At the same time incorporation of theology in the education and research system of state universities is being realized very slowly. The university scholars who do not participate in the education programs of theology believe it takes place at universities just because of the Russian Orthodox Church, on the one hand, desires to demonstrate its presence in state education, and, on the other hand, a university takes an interest in keeping the education services on account of the federal budget (it is of no consequence for the university what education programs are provided).

Any direction of research or education in universities has prospects of development, if it is called for society. In other words, it is supposed that a university and a religious organization together will solve important tasks for society. However, neither religious organizations no universities have formulated these tasks up to now. Some university scholars had earlier the hopes about incorporation of theology in academic life, but the hopes did not justify themselves. They were inspired by four ideas at least:

1. owing to the coming theology in the Russian universities they will be closer to the European universities, where theology is the integral part of Humanities;
2. education programs of theology will allow to discover new field of Humanities for university research;
3. learning of theology will strengthen the spiritual and moral side of the higher education;
4. university bachelors and masters of theology will enhance the education level of the clergy and it will promote to development of tolerance.

However, the opening of education programs of theology did not approximate the Russian universities to the European one. If, indeed, universities became closer each other then it is not the result of the unification of their education programs. Moreover, discussion about necessity of the approximation continues among the Russian scholars up to the present time.

The studying of theology at state universities did not promote appearance of any visible innovations in Humanities. There are priests teachers of theology, who are "practicians" in religion, but they are not scholar-researchers. The general level of theoretical knowledge of priests is much lower than the level of secular university teachers. Some part of philosophers has the certain interest in the field of theological problems, but this interest was formed because of approximation between philosophy and theology, it was regardless priests presence at universities. It is incorrectly to say teachers of theology to bring new ideas for Humanities at universities.

The studying of theology has not changed morality or spirituality of students radically. The students who study theology for a degree have fast religious morality, it does not need transformations, and neither students-theologians no their teacher-priests spread merits of their religion among other students. This situation can be explained through two circumstances. The first of them: priests do not carry on missionary work with students outside a lecture room. On the one hand, they observe the federal law of freedom of conscience; on the other hand, they do not consider casual conversations with students at universities are effective missionary activities. Instead of this, the Russian Orthodox Church proposes optional disciplines for students "The principles of the Orthodox culture", "The principles of the Orthodox morality" etc., and some universities included these disciplines in their education plans. However, students choose them very unwillingly. The second circumstance: although students-theologians being active believers should spray and state norms of the religious morality among other students, they prefer relations within their own student groups to relations out of the groups, since a religious individual prefers interaction with coreligionists to discussions with "strangers for faith".

The hope of the education level increase of the clergy owing to the studying of them at universities is not being realized as well. The professional education of clergy is provided at confessional schools (seminaries and academies). Although clergymen are a considerable group among students-theologians, they can be considered as "drop in the bucket" in comparison with the number of clergymen who get a qualification at ecclesiastical schools. Many clergymen have some "secular" qualification as the

result of their first higher education through programs of state universities before they entered the ministry and got ecclesiastical education as the result of further education.

#### 4. Tasks of Theology Development at State Universities

The question on a vector of theology development at state universities is very relevant, since neither universities nor religious organizations participating in education programs of theology define this vector. The vector is determined by the tasks, which are planned to decide through development of theology at universities, if such development is planned. There are three spheres of the tasks: research, education and professional training. In the research sphere, theology must produce the specific sort of knowledge, which can not be produced by researches of other fields of Humanity, and this knowledge will be necessary for society. In the sphere of education, the main principles of theology must be transmitted through tested education technologies, and it will provide increase of the necessary knowledge. In the sphere of professional training, the studying of theology must form competences of student which could be the basis for qualified decisions of the problems appearing in his professional activity.

The task of the education sphere is decided effectively through the worked out education technologies of secular education. The task of the professional sphere is far from the final decision, since religious organizations did not point to the future spheres of employment for students-theologians. Decision of the task on organization of research programs is the most difficult.

Obviously, development of theology at state universities must have own direction which is to be distinct from the direction realizing at confessional schools. Transference of the model of theological researches formed at seminaries and ecclesiastical academies to universities where education and research activity have the secular character will not be effective and expedient. There are ecclesiastical academies centers of theological researches in Russia. They combine researcher fellowships, journals and other elements of the academic system. No state university can form "the educational ladder" from bachelor's program to doctorate; no university can employ the number of scholars sufficient for the providing of this "ladder". The fact of foundation of the common dissertation council for theology by two state universities and two universities of the Russian Orthodox Church is the best of confirmations of this statement.

However, more important circumstance lies in the confessional character of the theological knowledge and theological researcher fellowship. Theologians always will experience incomprehension of secular researchers and teachers which formed

a majority of employers at state universities. Ideas about nonconfessional theology were not realized and cannot be realized in the theological education, since these ideas contain the mistake or illusion caused by non-critical comprehension of the historical and cultural context of existence of this kind of theological knowledge in Europe.

The Christian tradition knows two meanings of the term "theology":

1. word on God which come from witnesses possessing the experience of Communion;
2. discipline of scholars which is based on the experience of the witnesses, i.e. it is the system of logical argumentations and deductions explaining and justifying the confessional doctrine.

In the tradition of the West Christianity theology in the first meaning exists regardless of theology in the second one, although the connection between them is not interrupted. Nevertheless, "academic theology" is the study with own subject-matter, methods, ways of research and examination of knowledge. Theology having the foundations and theoretical constructions based on the statements and the context of the Divine revelation, as they are fixed in a magisterial anthology, is the confessional theology. The kind of theology neither principles of consideration no research results of which proceed from the Divine revelation and its forms fixed in the religious tradition is nonconfessional theology or philosophical theology [1]. It is proximate to philosophy of religion, and researches in its field are realized by philosophers. Such theology does not provide an education programs, although it can be a discipline.

In the tradition of the Orthodox Christianity theology must be based on the Divine revelation presented in experience of tradition, that is why theology can not exist outside the Church. Nonconfessional theology is not theology for the Russian Orthodoxy; it is called "religious philosophy" in the Russian tradition. In Russian history theology has never been studied at universities up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There is another notion of nonconfessional theology. It is theology, which is studied at the Protestant universities. It is based on the Christian principles which do not cause disagreements among the Protestant denominations. In other words, "nonconfessional" theology in such notion is the Protestant theology.

It is impossible to imagine nonconfessional theology which does not cause disagreements among the Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Judaists and Buddhists (if simply to enumerate "profiles" of theology pointed in the Russian education standard). Moreover, it is impossible to imagine nonconfessional theology which could be accepted by

all large religious organizations of Russia. Therefore, only confessional theology can exist as the education program.

Nevertheless, the confessional character of theology does not hinder its development at state universities through the way distinguished from the direction of theology at ecclesiastical schools. The specific feature of the university theology would be defined through the underlining of its comparative and analytic character. The comparative character of theology means theologians are not limited by the studying of doctrinal statements of their confession of faith, but they compare these statements with doctrines of other religions. The comparative kind of theology considers the first source to be the Divine revelation fixed in the magisterial anthology and existing in the tradition of own confession, but especially it studies various interpretations of the revelation. Of course, the interpretations are not accepted as equal for truth, but their comparison can see different aspects of dogmatic statements. Then the analytical method must be the basis of comparative researches. It can be realized in various kinds apart from theological analysis, for example, in history of philosophy, in logics, in history of religion. Thus, theology will be developed in the close cooperation with philosophical and religious studies.

## 5. Conclusion

Fear of clericalism penetration and violation of the constitutional statement for secular education at state schools turns out illusory and is not a barrier for development of theology at state universities. Slow character of its development is caused by transference of the model of theological education formed at seminaries and ecclesiastical academies to universities. Universities ought to refuse this model in favour of comparative theology which is close with philosophy of religion – the secular study of religion. Otherwise theological education at state universities will remain presence of religious organization, first and foremost the Russian Orthodox Church, at universities as a way of their representation in the public sphere.

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