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The role of public communication in establishing the theological educational system in Russia in XVIII – early XIX century

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Abstract

The emergence of special Church schools, colleges and seminaries as part of the formation of higher education in Russia in the XVIII century is considered in the article. Creation of a separate linked structure of theological educational institutions is analyzed in connection with the ecclesiastical realities of the time as well as the influence of University reforms and the expansion of European educational ideas. Exploring social, religious and political communications makes it possible to trace the origins of the main provisions, laid down as the basis of the complete system of theological education in Russia.

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1. Introduction

In Russia, the same as in Europe, the only source of systematic literacy apart from self-education, were urban schools at monasteries or cathedrals. Separate schools for the clergy did not exist, and therefore, the average educational level for priests conformed to simple dogmatism. Before the XVII century, the question of a separate system of education for the clergy had not even been raised in Russia, in so far as the problem of higher education in

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general had not been solved. In Europe, however, the body of knowledge of an educated man of that time corresponded to the level of the achievements of medieval science for liberales, the so called “arts liberales”, or “seven liberal arts”, which included philosophy and theology as the pinnacle of scientific achievement, and was embodied in the medieval idea of the university. In Moscow state, a similar idea had been often mentioned, even at the highest level of government, but the actual steps were never taken. The consequences appeared soon and resulted in the crisis of the Church schism in the seventeenth century. As a result of the crises, several attempts to create analogues of the European University had been undertaken, which eventually culminated in the opening in 1885 of the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow (Fonkich, 1998). At the time of its establishment the Academy had not yet fully conformed to the University level, however, it became not only an important precedent, but also more importantly, a source of educated people of a new type. Its establishment was the result of work of many patriotically minded figures, among the first of them is the figure of Patriarch Joachim. And although the Church in the person of its hierarchs and scholarly monks played a decisive role in the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy establishment, it became, after 1700, not specifically a Church school, but a kind of a medieval (the so-called “pre-classical”) state University (Larionov, 2010) for all classes (Rogov, 1959).

The question arises, how could it have happened that the first Russian University was not included in the future structure of the universities, and became instead the progenitor of the theological system of education? The answer can be obtained by exploring public, government and Church communications of that time. It is these communications one can find in the sources and which are partly analysed in the involved historiography, that became our main research material. The need to trace the status of the Academy during the XVIII century in the context of the European idea of the University (which had not been done in the historiographic works devoted to the Academy), required the need to determine its historic, social and cultural coordinates and involved the use of a comparative approach. Due to this method significant changes in the Academy life have been revealed that resulted in various transformations in its structure and activities, and then in the status. This change was preceded by some discussion in the form of public communication, expressed in the comments of contemporaries, the position of the ecclesiastical authorities, government regulations, and specific precedents in the life of the Academy. Thus, to see the overall picture, the method of systemic analysis was applied. This enabled us to obtain definitive conclusions.

2. Analysis

Peter I, who planned major reforms in all spheres of Russian society and state, did not pay attention to the problem of education of the clergy; however, at the beginning of his reign, he was expecting actions from some of the Church leaders, namely from Patriarch Adrian, whose initiative was not strong. In classic historiographical work on the subject (Smolich, 1996; Znamensky, 1881) the difficulties faced by government officials and hierarchs when they tried to build a global and interconnected system of theological schools and colleges are described in details. After the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, the first attempt to do it was taken; Peter produced many decrees on opening schools and colleges, including those for the clergy. However, the implementation of these decrees fell on the shoulders of the diocesan bishops, and each of them had to act independently, with the absence of central plan.

It became clear that for successful implementation of a centralized and controlled system of education the clergy had to solve several fundamental problems, namely: a unified system of financing and providing unified training and education quality control. In addition, it was necessary to establish a permanent body to implement the entire programme. This attempt was made after the setting of the Holy Synod in 1721, but it was able to solve the set task only partially. In the “Spiritual regulation”, Pskov Archbishop Feofan (Prokopovich) tries to outline the contours of the future system in the “Deeds of bishops” and “College Houses”. Most of the discussions relate to the educational and training areas, the financial plan proposes that the schools should be financed through not centralized Church tax, but diocesan one. At the same time, in 1721, a special organ of the Holy Synod was established – the Office of schools, headed by the Advisor of the Synod Archimandrite Gabriel (Buzhinskij), who became a protector of Moscow Academy after the death of Metropolitan Stefan (Yavorsky). At the end of 1721, Peter the Great carried out in the Synod an important decree on the education of the children of clergy not at primary schools but at the diocesan ones, which was the first step to transform the future seminaries into class educational institutions (Smolich, 1996). We believe this was the first impetus to the creation of an interesting phenomenon – the system of theological education outside the University system.

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