Metropolitan Hilarion takes part in international symposium on theology in international educational and academic space today



On November 1, 2018, an international symposium on Theology in the Present-Day Academia took place at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.

I was organized by the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) and the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies (CMI) as part of the Second All-Russia (with international participation) academic conference under the theme 'Theology in the Present-Day Academia'. The symposium was held with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and with the support of the Presidential Administration and the Interreligious Council in Russia.

It was attended by leading world and Russian academics dealing with problems of theology and representatives of the Interreligious Council in Russia, the experts board on theology of the Supreme Attestation Commission under the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Federal

Association for education methodology in theology, the Moscow Patriarchate inter-department group for teaching theology in universities as well as the academic and pedagogical community.

During the second session of the symposium devoted to Theology as Academic Discipline: World Experience and Russian Realities, the participants were addressed by the RUDN rector, Academic V. M. Filippov, chairman of the Supreme Attestation Commission.

The next to speak was Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR) and CMI rector and chairman of the inter-department group on teaching theology in universities. He noted that the event was devoted to the world experience of developing theology and its place in the university environment and in the structure of academic scholarship. He said that 'The topicality and need of addressing the experience of other countries is prompted by several reasons. First of all, any academic knowledge is international; it cannot be limited to the boundaries of a single country or a single community. Theology in Russia today is shaping precisely as a branch of academic knowledge. For this reason, addressing the international experience appears beneficial. Another reason for addressing the experience of other countries stems from the specificity of the development of theology in our country. Theology in Russia historically turned out to be outside the university environment and ascribed to the sphere of religious education. In the first place, it was because theological academies in Russia had appeared in Russia earlier than universities did'.

His Eminence stated that in our time theology, in the consciousness of many, belongs exclusively to the sphere of specialized religious education and its university status is challenged. At the same time, it is not taken into account that historically this situation was linked not with the status of theology itself but with the reason mentioned above. In contrast to this state of affairs, theology in the European space existed freely in the university.

'Another peculiarity of no less impact on theology in Russia is that the development of theology as scholarship was interrupted under the Soviet regime. The academic theological knowledge could not develop because of the persecution against believers and due to a lack of the possibility for international exchange of experience accumulated in Western theology. The point here is not the doctrinal part of theological scholarship but the progress it has made in studying sources. We are harvesting the fruits of this historical period in the life of our country to this day, exerting efforts to eliminate the gaps which have accumulated in theological scholarship in that time', the DECR chairman said.

His Eminence stressed that 'aware of the importance of addressing the international experience of theological education and scholarship, we realize that it should to be considered critically. A study of

foreign experience does not mean that this experience should be automatically copied'.

In his opinion, theology can be essentially only confessional as distinct to religious studies which consider religions and various confessions from outside as objects of knowledge. 'The awareness of this specifics of theology gives us an opportunity, on one hand, for building a study of international theological experience on the right grounds and, on the other hand, for organising adequately our own system of theological education. In this system, theology cannot be an abstract generalized scholarship, but should be precisely confessional – Orthodox. Jewish, Islamic, etc., which will be correspondent to the confessional diversity of our country', Metropolitan Hilarion said with confidence.

His Eminence addressed examples from the Western theological education, which touch upon the relevant tendencies in the development and shaping of theology in Russia.

The metropolitan's remarks were followed by speeches of guests from Switzerland, Slovakia, Romania, Armenia, Bulgaria and Iran, who considered various problems of theological education. They discussed the world experience of the development of theology as a branch of scholarship, theological trends developing in universities in other countries, the importance of theology for a stable development of Russia, the preservation, strengthening and handing down traditional cultural and religious values, international cooperation, international and interreligious dialogue in face of global challenges, relevance of the past and present theological (religious) education in other countries and the place of theology in the structure of academic scholarship.

Among the participants in the event were Archpriest Vladimir Vorobyev, rector of the St. Tikhon Orthodox University of the Humanities (STOUH) and chairman of the federal academic-methodological association for the discipline of Theology, Archpriest Constantine Polskov, STOUH pro-recto for academic work, Archpriest Alexander Zadornov, Moscow Theological Academy pro-rector for academic theological work, Archpriest Lev Semenov, head of the STOUH educational center, Dr. M. Simonova, director of the RUDN Institute of Comparative Educational Policy, and Dr. M. Mchedlova, head of the RUDM Comparative Politology Chair.

Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for interreligious relations and executive secretary of the Interreligious Council in Russia and academic secretary of the United Dissertation Council, greeted the attendees on behalf of the Interreligious Council in Russia and spoke about the work of the council for developing theological education and scholarship. He said that it is thanks in many ways to a consolidated position of the religious leaders who expressed it in the Interreligious Council in Russia that theology has been recognized as an academic discipline and a Dissertation Council for Theology has been established. He also spoke about the first defense of a dissertation to be made on theology by K. Neklyudov, who presented a study on 'The Galilee Context of the Preaching of Jesus Christ: Problems

Formulated by the 19th-20th Century Bible Studies and Their Solution in the Light of the Present-Day Archeology'. The seeker was granted the academic degree of Candidate of Theology, Specialty 26.00.01 – Theology.

DECR Communication Service

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