Patriarch Kirill chairs Supreme Church Council regular session



February 28, 2018 – His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia chaired the 2018 first session of the Supreme Church Council, which took place at the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow.

The agenda of the session includes the following items:

- Implementation of decisions of the Supreme Church Council and the Bishop Council
- Creation of a single database on students;
- Adoption of the date and subject of the 2019 Christmas Readings and other matters.

His Holiness Kirill made introductory remarks on the agenda including the teaching of theology in the Church's schools in the context of its relations with the state and universities.

He said in particular that there are still questions arising in our society and media space concerning the

study of theology in secular universities and the defense of Master's and Doctor's dissertations in theology although the Church has repeatedly and apparently quite convincingly answered them. 'But if they remain we need to say something else and to continue the discussion. What does the state need theology for at all? Why should it finance the training of theologians from public funds? These questions do arise from time to time and it is necessary to remove all the doubts that theology is rightfully included in the system of scientific knowledge taught in a number of higher education institutions'.

The very posing of this question, His Holiness said, has been predetermined by our recent past when atheism for decades excluded any possibility for discussing the presence of theology in the higher education system. 'In countries in which there were no theomachist regimes, it never entered in any one's head, even in the so-called socialist camp, to deny the scientific nature of theology as an important part of the knowledge of general humanities… In the GDR, no questions arose about the wisdom of the presence of theology in the university system. But in the Soviet Union, the very posing of this question was impossible'.

'The state's support of theology', he continued, 'by no means questions the principle of the secular nature of education, but it represents, if you like, a symbolic end of the value system in education that was not created by the academic community but rather by party ideologues and was aggressively atheistic. Reflecting on this problem, it should be taken into account that the accredited theological schools, such as Moscow Theological Academy, St. Petersburg Theological Academy, Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute and Orenburg, Penza, Saratov, Smolensk and Sretensky Seminaries train their students according to state standards'.

His Holiness said that the textbooks published by Chairs of Scientific Atheism in the 1980s, still filling major library stocks cannot meet the need for teaching religion in the world in which the religious factor is growing with each year. 'The year 1988 – the Millennium of the Baptist of Russia demonstrated to all the Soviet people the fact of the Church's presence in public space and the significance of the religious factor. But even that event failed to awaken a desire to begin the serious study of theology in higher education schools'.

Last year, he said, the first MA dissertation on theology was defended. 'This event, as small as it may seem in itself, has become historic, because it was the first to happen in the post-Soviet higher education system. There should be dozens as many such studies annually. It is necessary to publish new textbooks and educational aids on theology for various levels of higher education schools, including with the state's support. The state supports theology as any other branch of scientific knowledge. The question 'What is theology for?' is no less absurd as the question 'wat is philosophy for?' or 'What is psychology for?' For sure, there are those who will say that neither philosophy, nor psychology is a science. It is not today that this dispute between physics and lyrics, between humanities and natural

sciences has developed..., but still no one raises the question of excluding such disciplines as philosophy or psychology from the sphere of scientific studies'.

'Theology teaches many things, including the breadth of views and tolerance. It may seem a paradox but theological education inevitably broadens one's mental outlook and teaches one to respect people of other cultures. This quality is important for any person who claims to be educated', His Holiness said and referred to Academician Sergey Averintsev and his book *Theology in Context of Culture*.

Patriarch Kirill concluded his remarks by saying that 'partnership between the state and traditional religious communities in teaching the knowledge of religion is a need of the hour. And the common goal to raise the level of academic knowledge in an area that for a long time was undeservingly put on the margins of science is evident and indisputable today'.

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