



Round table on Theology in Modern World: Russian and Foreign Experience held as part of Christmas Readings at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies



The Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies (CMI) held a round-table conference on Theology in the Modern World: Russian and Foreign Experience, as part of the 26th Christmas Educational Readings. With the blessing of CMI rector Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the event was opened by CMI pro-rector for academic work Prof. D. Shmonin. The round table was attended by representatives of secular and ecclesial higher education institutes, synodal and diocesan departments in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Republic of Tatarstan and other regions in Russia.

Papers were read by Prof. D. Shmonin; Prof. V. Shokhin, head of the theology section, Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Theology; Prof. G. Vdovina, PhD, CMI chair of theology and liturgics; and Hegumen Serapion (Mitko), CandPhil, synodal mission department.

In his paper on *Are Sciences Returning to Theology?*, Prof. Shmonin suggested that the issue of theology as part of the modern scientific knowledge should be considered on the basis of the classification of sciences offered by Academician B. Kedrov (1903-1985). If 'Kedrov's Triangle' is considered not as a pattern for the entire disciplinarily organized science but as the foundation of a stereometric classification, it is possible to reflect both the moves up to the top of the tetrahedron from the empirical to theoretical knowledge and the value-oriented outlook levels of the scientific and philosophical knowledge. In this pattern, theology can be described as the upper layer adjacent to the top of the pyramid since theology is the source of basic absolute values the presence of which is not envisioned in Kedrov's pattern.

Prof. Shokhin in his paper on *Theology in Today's World and Today's Problems of Theology* criticized the passport of the scientific specialty of Theology. According to the speaker, as the present passport actually reproduces the structure of the specialty of Religious Studies, it needs to be essentially redrafted and to clarify both the nature of theology proper as a science different from religious studies. He made some specific remarks both on the formula of the specialty one for all religions and the points expanding its content.

Commenting the important remarks made by Prof. Shokhin, Prof. Shmonin noted that the present passport of the specialty played its role when it was important to ensure in principle the inclusion of theology in the Higher Attestation Commission's classification of academic disciplines. The First National Conference on Theology in the Educational Space of the Humanities formulated a proposal on the religious and confessional principle of the division of Theology into groups of specialties. The proposals supported by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill are presented to the Ministry of Education and Science. Therefore, the next step is to develop several passports respective of distinctive features of each of the traditional religions having a systematic theology.

In his paper on *Which Methodology Is to Be Used by a Post-graduate Theologian?*, Ms. Vdovina pointed out that there is a problem of the exact understanding of what Theology is as adopted by the Higher Attestation Commission as an academic discipline. It is different from church theology primarily in its content, being firstly a second-order reflection over the primary theological thought and secondly in its methods as presupposing self-restriction in academic research to the general methodological principles of the humanities. According to Prof. Vdovina, the principal task is to avoid mixing specific tasks of church theology with universal theology and to ensure their complementarity and mutual influence.

Father Serapion, in his paper on *Can a Theologian Be a Researcher of Religion and a Researcher of Religion a Theologian?* dealt with the problem of contrasting theology and religious study. He pointed out that in the discussion on the scientific nature of theology, religious study and theology are presented

as opposing poles of the knowledge of religion, with religious study ascribed scientific nature while theology often deprived of this status. However, their visible contradiction is not so evident if looked at more closely: historically, Russian religious study arises from the need of a theologian to study a different religious tradition. According to Father Serapion, the institutionalization of theology as an academic specialty can become an important factor of the development of Russian religious studies.

The questions and remarks of participants reflected the relevance of the issues raised by the round table and the need for further discussion on substantial and terminological issues regarding theology.

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