Patriarch Kirill chairs a conference on Theology in Universities: State-Society Cooperation

[gallery]

November 28, 2012 – a Conference on Theology in Universities: State-Society Cooperation began at the conference hall of Danilovskaya Hotel in Moscow. It is organized with the support of the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity. Its purpose is to systematise the experience of theological education in Russian universities and to elaborate measures for its extension on the basis of church-state and church-society partnership.

The presidium of the conference included Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Varsonofy of Saransk and Mordovia, chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk in his capacity of rector of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate and Doctoral School, Metropolitan Merkury of Rostov and Novocherkassk, head of the Department for Religious Education and Catechism, Archbishop Yevgeny of Vereya, chairman of the Education Committee, A. Fursenko, presidential advisor, V. Sadovnichy, rector of Moscow University, and S. Karpov, dean of the Moscow University's Department of History.

The Conference is attended by hierarchs, federal and regional government officials, leaders of church academic institutions and directors of theological academic programs – altogether over 200 people from over 40 regions in Russia.

In his opening remarks, Patriarch Kirill focused on the renewal of religious faith in Russian society today and the need to respond to it by offering a high quality theological education as it forms an adequate knowledge of religion and the Church. Theology in universities, he said, does not contradict the principle of secularity understood not in the spirit of aggressive secularism but as a neutral worldview and offered to those who freely choose it. 'Theology in university is not an exotic discipline or a whim of some churchmen or an attempt to interfere in the other's space to impose the religious worldview on students or to put obstacles for teaching traditional academic disciplines. Theology in universities is a cultural

imperative for society which for a long time has been actually alienated from religion as a special sphere of human existence', he said.

Patriarch Kirill called upon ruling bishops to show all possible concern for the development of cooperation between their dioceses and higher education institutions since 'the presence of Orthodox theology in the common academic space and its creative interaction with humanitarian arts and natural science disciplines should help raise the level of academic theology as a complex of educational disciplines and a sphere of research'.

Pointing to the progress made in teaching theology in universities in recent years, Patriarch Kirill draw the participants' attention to the existing problems, the most important of them being the absence of a united system of theological education in higher education schools. As urgent measures for optimizing the situation, he pointed to the need to regulate the partnership between the state and religious confessions in theological education and to elaborate and adopt a long-term plan for the logistic and financial support of theological education in universities as a united system and for inclusion of theology in the list of research specialities recognized by the Higher Attestation Commission. He also called all healthy forces of society including the Church and other religious confessions and the religious and secular education system to unite efforts for solving spiritual and moral problems facing our society.

Mr. A. Sadovnichy spoke about the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the history of Moscow State University and the cooperation between his university and Moscow Theological Academy. 'From the historical perspective, the Orthodox Church played an exceptional role in the development of public education in Russia', he said. He also informed the gathering about the work of the Board for Theology established together by the Moscow University's Department of History and the St. Tikhon's Humanitarian University and reported that as of today, chairs of theology have been opened in over 30 higher education institutes in Russia.

Mr. Fursenko, in his speech, dealt among other things with the existing experience of cooperation between the government and the Russian Church.

Metropolitan Hilarion, in his remarks, spoke about interaction between theology and other academic disciplines.

Several university rectors and scholars shared their experience of teaching theology in their schools.

On November 29, the Conference will continue working in sections. Section I will deal with the theme ‘Church, Society, University: Models and Strategies of Cooperation’ and Section II with ‘Theological Education: From a Baccalaureate School to a Research Center’.

DECR Communication Service

Patriarchal Press Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/53363/