# The "Idea of the University" in the Russian Theological Academies (19th and Early 20th Centuries)*

**Natalia Yu. Sukhova**
St. Tikhon's Orthodox University
Moscow, Russia

# "Идея университета" в духовных академиях России (XIX – начало XX века)

**Наталия Юрьевна Сухова**
Православный Свято-Тихоновский гуманитарный университет
Москва, Россия

Abstract

For the first time, the Humboldtian university model is considered against the background of the 19th- and early 20th-century history of the Russian theological academies. The influence of educational ideas—direct or mediated by the experience of Russian universities—upon higher theological schools is traced along different historical phases delineated by two reforms: one that, between 1808 and 1814, introduced certain university elements into the life of the academies, and another that, in 1869, ushered in the research university model in its entirety. The author concludes that the fundamental principles of the research university significantly affected the further development of Russian theological scholarship, stimulating processes of specialization within the field and triggering the use of the method of historical criticism in all branches of theology. At the same time, however, some of the elements of the research university model failed to meet the specific needs of the theological schools. The application of methods of historical criticism, in turn, prompted speculation about the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the affiliation of theological scholarship with the Church, and the limits of freedom in theological scholarship.

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Keywords

Russian theological academies, Humboldtian university model, concept of a university, "research university," theology, theological scholarship, critical historical methods

Резюме

Статья посвящена истории "идеи университета" в духовных академиях России в XIX – начале XX в. На материалах реформ российского духовного образования, проектов, аналитических записок и дискуссий автор выявляет влияние западноевропейских научно-образовательных моделей и опыта российских университетов на высшую духовную школу на разных исторических этапах. Первым ключевым моментом в развитии "идеи университета" в российской духовной школе является реформа 1808–1814 гг., когда в модель духовной академии были включены некоторые университетские черты. Вторым ключевым моментом стала реформа 1869 г., когда российские духовные академии были преобразованы в согласии с моделью "университета исследования". Автор приходит к выводу, что основные принципы "университета исследования" оказали заметное влияние на развитие богословской науки в России, ее специализации, стимулировали активное введение историко-критических методов во всех областях богословия. Однако не все университетские черты оказались приемлемыми для духовной школы с ее особыми задачами; использование же историко-критических методов в богословских исследованиях обострило рефлексию конфессиональности богословской науки, богодухновенности священных текстов, свободы научно-богословского исследования.

Ключевые слова

российские духовные академии, "идея университета", "университет исследования", богословская наука, историко-критические методы

## Introduction

The reforms of European education undertaken in recent decades have been intended to correct deficiencies, but also to challenge educators with many new questions and problems. These trends also affected Russian theological schools, called upon, on the one hand, to integrate fully into the Russian academic and educational system and, on the other hand, into the international one. To do this, the theological schools had to adopt some of the ideas that are typical of these systems, and in a very difficult timeframe: educational spaces themselves are dynamic, and the complex processes taking place within them can become the subjects of heated disputes, which, as it sometimes seems, do not ever reach a definitive resolution. Whereas for some specialists new ideas seem too radical, as breaking the very idea of theological schools, for others they can appear too sluggish and not modern enough. The problems of modern theological schools encourage us to focus on the experience gained by previous generations, i.e., on tradition. Furthermore, there are certain features specific to the current system of theological and religious education in Russia

that can easily be lost in the process of integration. We need to appraise the true value of those specific features in order to understand whether we can afford to lose them or must work to keep them. An additional incentive for returning to tradition is provided by certain aspects of how theological and religious education are organized in Russia, which, in the context of current processes, we should either reject or, if we feel confident in their value, work to combine them harmoniously with new ideas.

Russian theological schools represent an interesting phenomenon, both historically and theologically.[1] On the one hand, a theological school is intended to educate future priests to serve the Orthodox Church in the most difficult of arenas. On the other hand, at its highest level, the academy, it should prepare scholars to serve the Church through research, and for that reason theological academies have always been "laboratories of theological thought." Preparation for these ministries, in light of their specific challenges, has always required special conditions, a special rhythm of life, and a special type of personality. In the 19th- and early 20th-century Russian context, theological academies and seminaries were called "spiritual" institutions. The very term "spiritual" has multiple meanings: on the one hand, it refers to the main purpose of the school in training future priests; on the other hand, during the Synodal period (1721–1918) the school served the Estate-related purpose of providing free education for young men who belonged to the so-called Spiritual Estate, i.e., the sons of the clergy. But the notion of "spirituality" goes beyond that in pointing to the inextricable link between intellectual and spiritual life, to the mystical depth of the Church, to the formation of the integral personality to serve God and the Church. Understanding this depth, and fine-tuning theological education accordingly, has always been a challenge for theological schools, especially at the highest level: the theological ("spiritual") academies. In this article, however, the author prefers the term "theological," which is familiar in the European context.

## Study

Some features and rights of universities date back to the first Russian schools: the Kiev-Moghila School and the Slavic-Greek-Latin School of Moscow, which received the status of Academy in 1701. In the very structure of these schools, a sequence of philologically and philosophically oriented "courses," topped by theology, were adopted by the Kiev School from the Jesuit colleges and then translated to Moscow; in this structure, one can find similarities with a medieval university curriculum in which the youngest (that is, the philosophical) department has been divided into classes, and of the three special departments

[1] There is some general literature on the Russian theological school in the 19th century in [Титлинов 1908–1909; Тарасова 2005; Сухова 2006; eadem 2009].

there remains only the theological one. All these features give historiographers of the Russian universities a reason to consider the Moscow Academy not only the first Moscow High School, but also the immediate predecessor of Moscow University [Ridder-Symoens 1996; Андреев 2009; Ларионов 2010]. However, the situation is not so simple, as the University of Moscow at the time of its establishment, in 1755, was truncated in comparison with the European model: theology was not included in the University but was left in the care of the Holy Synod [УУМУ 1830].

From the 1760s through the 1780s, a new "university rush" began in Russia: a number of projects were drawn up, some of which were focused on religious education and theology as a subject of study. Thus, it was proposed either to reorganize the existing Academies (in Kiev and Moscow) into "theological universities," or to include theology in the University of Moscow program in the form of a department to be controlled by the University or by the Church [Чистович 1857: 66–67; Александренко 1873; Лазаревский 1896; Петров Н. 1906: 487–488; Рождественский 1910: 30–39, 268–323; Титлинов 1916: 766–779; Петров Ф. 1997: 43–44]. However, in those years most of the new ideas remained at the draft stage.

In the early 19th century two educational reforms were successively conducted in Russia, the university reform (1803–1804) and the reform of theological schools (1808–1814). As a result of these reforms, two scientific and educational systems similar in structure were set forth [УМУ 1830; УУДУ 1830: 383; ПУПДУ 1830: 950–954]. The higher levels of these systems, i.e., universities and theological academies, were also similar. And it is at this level where the main educational principles, the "philosophy" of education, were defined.

One of the "university" elements applied to the theological academies was a system of academic and pedagogical qualification "parallel" to the university system: student, candidate, master, and doctor [Сухова 2009]. Extension of the university "degrees" to "theological learning" was regarded as challenging. For example, in 1812 Hieromonk Philaret (Drozdov), a teacher in the capital's Theological Academy that was the first to undergo the transformation, wrote: ". . . when the teachers in church became scarce, there appeared doctors, professors, and bachelors. The spirit of the Gospel, just like alcohol, is now measured in degrees" [ФДП 2003: 658]. However, two years later the Holy Hierarch Philaret himself became a Doctor of Theology, and as a rector of the Theological Academy of St. Petersburg, he took part in conferring the first master's and candidate's degrees on the first students graduating from the Theological Academy.

But the "idea of the university" in the Theological Academy model was interrelated with three other ideas: 1) being a center of research, that is, an academy of theological research; 2) providing religious upbringing of "Youth dedicated

to the Church" [УУДУ 1830: 368]; and 3) providing professional training for theological ministry. This combination had the potential to complicate the organization and procedures of the academies. The scientific academy was thus separated from its educational function, even though the same professors were required both to cultivate erudition and to teach [ПУПДУ 1830: 916, 938]. The main academic body at the Theological Academy, along the lines of the Academy of Sciences, was the Conference, which included both internal and external members [ПУПДУ 1830: 938–940; УМУ 1830: 571]. While a university inspector had to keep an eye mainly on state-funded (bursary) students to make sure they attended classes [УМУ 1830: 582–583], the "inner formation of young men to be disposed toward an active Christianity" was seen as the "sole mission" of the academies [УУДУ 1830: 369; ПУПДУ 1830: 911]. Although the academies were not pastoral schools as such, since this task was given predominantly to seminaries, their theological and professional purpose did introduce certain peculiarities: for example, the doctoral and master's insignia—crosses—and the doctorate in theology were accessible to the clergy only.[2]

Practice revealed certain weak and ill-conceived features of the Theological Academy model, and by the middle of the 19th century many people were dissatisfied with it. Academy graduates were accused of lacking special theological knowledge required in various spheres of Church life; "theological encyclopedism" appeared to have undergone degradation; and the system of scientific and pedagogical qualification failed to meet its main objective, which was to stimulate research activity. As a consequence, the concept of the "Academy of Theological Research" was not implemented in its planned entirety. A more successful concept of a higher theological school was yet to be found.

The key concepts of the new 1869 Charter of the Theological Academies were "specialization" and "research." The academies were intended to encourage specialized research by members of teaching corporations and graduates in theology, and one of the methods of solving this problem was specialization: students in their first three years were supposed to focus on a range of disciplines taught in their chosen department, whereas students in the final year focused on a narrower group of subjects, and professors focused only on the disciplines they taught [УШПДА 1873: 545, 548–549, 553].

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[2] See [ПУПДУ 1830: §402–406, 419, 424–425, pp. 947, 948, 949] (see above). Although the 1814 Charter did not require priesthood in order to become a Doctor of Theology, the agreed right for a Doctor of Theology to be a "Christian teacher" (§419) was understood in exactly this way, and in practice, throughout the duration of the Charter, the doctorate was only given to persons with a ministerial rank. The only exception over the course of fifty-five years (1814–1869) is when the degree of Doctor of Theology was given to Georgy Mavrokordato, a professor at the University of Athens; but that was intended to help the fraternal Local Church which, at that time, was struggling to revive academic approaches to theology, and needed the evidence of academic status for its best scholars.

Theological academies were turned into theological universities of a sort: only the Scriptures of both Testaments, basic theology, and a block of philosophical disciplines remained compulsory for all students, while all the other disciplines were distributed across three departments (Theology, Church History, and Church Praxis) [УШПДА 1873: 552]. The final-year (fourth-year) course went beyond basic theological education and focused on actually preparing the best students for research and teaching and for writing the master's thesis [ibid.: 553–554; ПИ 1874]. Theological research by teachers was stimulated by the fact that faculty positions required certain degrees to be taken (a master's degree for an associate professor and adjunct professor, and a doctorate for a full professor) [УШПДА 1873: §46–48, 145–146, pp. 547, 554]; on top of that, doctorates were made accessible for laymen, and the subsequent period demonstrated the commitment of this part of the academies' professorate to research activity.[3]

Of the four ideas included in the model of the Theological Academy in the early 19th century, the first two—the Academy of Sciences and the University—gained strength and merged, while the other two—spiritual training and the pastoral ideal—weakened. The weakening of the pastoral ideal can also be seen in the fact that during the entire period when the 1869 Charter was in effect, pastoral theology in all four academies was taught by laymen. Indeed, so the logic went, if pastoral theology is a science (a university discipline), then why can it not be taught by any capable professor?

Although the 1869 Reform addressed internal spiritual and academic problems, the transformation relied on educational ideas of the time—first of all, on the idea of a "research university"—albeit with a time lag of half a century. The influence of the "Classical University" concept was reflected, above all, in the fact that spiritual academies had shifted the focus of their work to research and inquiry, and they invited teachers and students to take part in this process of education through learning and research (in German, *Bildung durch Wissenschaft*). Permission for all professors and associate professors of the academies to create their own syllabi, to choose textbooks, and to regulate teaching time at their own discretion, only submitting final reports on the given course to the academic council, is an echo of the idea of "freedom to teaching" (*Lehrfreiheit*). This also included the introduction of "free" teachers (*Privatdozenten*), who, according to the Charter, were absolutely free to choose a teaching discipline and free to terminate courses at their discretion, merely by informing the authorities [УШПДА 1873: 547–548]. An echo of the "freedom to learn" is suggested by the provision of students with a double choice of specialization through divisions and subject groups in the final year. Finally,

[3] In the fifteen years during which the 1869 Charter was in operation, 33 out of 40 Doctorates in Theology (82.5%) were awarded to laymen (Academy professors).

there were specifically negotiated auxiliary aids to be provided to the academies: the availability of academic trips and the organization of research competitions, awards, museums, and offices, which were also characteristic features of a "research university" [ibid.: 555].

There is also a more subtle confluence: in the "special and practical lectures," one can recognize colloquia for critical analysis of sources, characteristic of the "classic university" [*РГИА 797*: 423]; in the strengthening philosophical orientation [ibid.: 54, 421, 425–425v, 427], one can see the increased value of the Faculty of Philosophy which reflected the passion for "pure" science [Андреев 2009: 506–512, 520–522]; and in the weakening vocational pastoral orientation of the theological academies, one can recognize the lower value of professionally oriented faculties.

Of course, the "research university" model also had an effect on Russian universities, and thus could be studied by academies both directly through the German academic "statutes" and indirectly through the Charter of Russian Universities, especially as in the preparations for the spiritual and academic reform of 1869 it was repeatedly emphasized that it "follows" the reform of Russian universities of 1863 [*РГИА 797*: 399–438]. For example, the provisions for *Privatdozenten* in the 1869 Charter of Theological Academies are very similar to those of the 1863 University Charter [УШПДА 1873: 547–548; ОУИРУ 1866: 630].

However, a direct impact of Humboldtian University and its Faculty of Theology is also evident. For example, German academic theology also had its effect on the structure of education in the academies: all theological disciplines were divided into exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical specializations; the first was made compulsory, whereas the other three were defined by their respective departments. Preparatory documents to the 1869 Reform contain only general references to European universities; however, articles published in the "academic" periodicals confirm that German universities—primarily, the University of Berlin—were at the center of attention [Серединский 1869: 342–354].[4] In addition, the rector of the capital's Academy, Archpriest John Yanyshev, who had served at the Russian cathedral in Wiesbaden for a long time, considered the "research university" very useful, and many of the ideas in the 1869 Charter belonged to him.

The 1869 Charter remained in force for only fifteen years. It definitely had some success in the research enthusiasm that gripped both teachers and students of higher theological schools; in the debates and discussions that took

[4] Archpriest T. F. Seredinskiy, who graduated from the capital's Theological Academy, was a rector at the embassy church in Berlin. His article summarizes the Theological Faculty Charter: "Statuten der theologischen Facultät der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin 1838."

place; in the international contacts in the form of internships at European universities; in the analysis of sources in libraries and archives; and in the rather quick results in the form of doctoral and master's theses. The freedom of teaching and the institution of *Privatdozenten* encouraged creativity in the development of new courses [ГС 1916: 260–272; ВСМДА 1914: 672–674; ВСМДА 1915: 714–721]. However, it turned out that higher theological schools were unprepared for such a radical transformation, and the Church system as a whole was not ready to use specially trained personnel. Insufficient training and clarification of new ideas, particularly of special and practical lectures, reduced their effectiveness and provoked remarks about their incompatibility with the tradition of Russian theological schools. Another problem was decreased attention to the specifics of the theological school: the academic rhythm was governed by a passion for research, often at the expense of the liturgical and spiritual life of teachers and students [ГС 1916: 388, 9–15; ВСМДА 1916: 610].

In 1884, a new reform of the theological academies abolished the main ideas of 1869: departmental specialization, a special final-year schedule, and *Privatdozenten* [*РГИА 1604*; ОЗ 1884: 23–24, 33–37]. Teachers at the academies were obliged to lecture from predefined programs, and special emphasis was placed on the religious life of theological academies, as well as on enhancing liturgical life and on the pastoral training of students. Thus, it might seem that the idea of a "research university" had been rejected by the Russian spiritual and academic tradition. However, this is not quite true. The connection between research and training in theological academies has remained inseparable ever since, although there were attempts to "protect" the educational process from unverified research findings; this relationship persisted also both in the "degree-related" requirements for teachers and in the research requirements for dissertations [УШПДА 1887: 234–235, 241]. The "freedom of teaching" was also partially preserved: despite repeated requests from the Synod, researchers told their audiences what they believed was most important for achieving academic qualifications, without adhering to the approved programs. Despite the fact that specialized practical classes had little success within the terms of the 1869 Charter, colloquia in one form or another, for example, student groups or teaching experiments, reappeared in the academies later on. Finally, in spite of repeated attempts to focus the research interests of theological academies exclusively on theology, academies still contained a wide spectrum of different disciplines.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, representatives of academies insistently suggested not only returning to the academic features of the 1869 Charter, but also strengthening them by more precisely following the example of European universities. Thus, the 1905 draft proposal for the Moscow Theological Academy proposed fundamentally enhancing the flexibility of education

and involving students in the building up of their own "educational path"; abolishing the obligation to remain in a certain course, following the example of German universities; and only obliging a student to stay at the Academy for at least four years, during which time they were to submit a certain number of written papers annually and pass exams and tests. The main ideologist behind the project was Professor I. V. Popov, who had been on an internship in Germany, at Berlin and Munich universities, a short time before (in the 1902–1903 academic year) [ЖПЗПП 1907: 53–57].

More radical modes of connecting theology with the "university idea" were considered in these years. For example, Archpriest Pavel Svetlov, Professor of Theology at the University of Kiev, who believed the development of theological research to be impossible in "denominational schools" such as the theological academies, suggested that it be completely transferred to the universities, where theological departments would be established [ЖПЗПП: 48–53, 58–61; Светлов 1897; idem 1906]. However, most representatives of theological academies supported the retention of the existing model of the higher theological school that had demonstrated its viability, albeit with a more consistent adoption of academic ideas (freedom to conduct research, to teach, and to study, and a diversity of forms of education, such as colloquia and specialized courses) [ЖПЗПП 1907: 53].

Another stage of the "academic aspirations" among the theological academies presented itself in 1918, although it was stimulated by extreme conditions and the impossibility of the existence of the old denominational model of the theological academy. Two academies—one in Petrograd and the other in Kazan—attempted to merge into local universities in the form of theological faculties. They failed, but the project drawn up by N. N. Glubokovsky, a professor at the Petrograd Academy, attempted to combine the advantages of a university faculty with those of an independent Church school. On closer examination, it becomes clear that this project was a more elaborate version of the 1760s proposal by the Department of Theology at the University of Moscow.

## Conclusions

1. Despite certain "fluctuations" in the process of transforming the theological academies, the academic features of a university were never totally extraneous to the Russian higher theological schools from the time of their foundation. Also, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the elements of a university model were becoming increasingly important, especially in the field of research and education.

2. "Fluctuations" superimposed on the general strengthening of the "idea of the university" were due to three main factors: 1) the distinctive features of

historical periods and ecclesiastical situations that directly or indirectly influenced theological schools; 2) the unwillingness fully to use innovations, leading to their rejection; 3) the underestimation of the particular ecclesiastical, educational, and professional challenges of the higher theological school, which could not be fully met within a university model.

3. The experiment conducted from 1869 to 1884 put Russian theological academies as close as possible to the model of the classical European university. Thus, it helped to clearly recognize the features that were both useful and unacceptable for the higher spiritual school. Some elements came to stay, becoming essential for the higher theological school, and they survived all further modifications of the model.

4. Integrating university features into the higher theological school model and their adaptation and adjustment turned out to be both a positive and a negative experience. On the one hand, the legacy of the Russian theological school should be taken into account during its current transformations. On the other hand, this chapter in the history of Russian theological education is also an integral part of the history of European higher education. Therefore, without a detailed study of all the nuances and peculiarities of the implementation of the seemingly well-known idea of the Classical University in Russian theological schools, the history of European education cannot be considered complete.

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проф. **Наталия Юрьевна Сухова**, доктор церковной истории, доктор ист. наук
Православный Свято-Тихоновский гуманитарный университет,
Богословский факультет, профессор кафедры общей и русской церковной истории и канонического права
127051 Москва, Лихов пер., д. 6
Россия/Russia
suhovanat@gmail.com

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