

Post-Soviet Protestants between the Church and the University

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Considering itself in the intellectual context of modernity, theology learns to be “humble” and “generous^[1],” in other words, it learns to receive gratefully and share generously, which suggests, at the very least, an intention of good neighborliness and common acknowledgement among other sciences and cultural traditions. A humble theology seeks fellow travelers, does not spurn advice, and, taking advantage of all available resources, asks bold questions about “justification of the future^[2],” about looking forward to a future in which theology becomes an integral part, perhaps even the axis of a new spiritual-cultural epoch, a new pivotal period and, possibly, a witness of *the last days*.

Faced with the issue of mutual enrichment between theology and academic science, theology, more keenly than ever, feels its irreducibility in relation to science, its *simplicity* in comparison. And in this renewed realization of simplicity, theology discovers the secret of faith, the risk of connection, and the gift of closeness to God.

In this sense Evangelical churches are fully modern, in step with general trends in theology. Post-soviet Evangelical Protestants have almost nothing to be proud of in the absence of a developed theology

[1] Soloviy, Roman. Theology of the Emerging Church: Postmodern Epistemology and the Interpretation of Scripture // Theological Reflections. Euro-Asian Theological Journal. – 2010. – #11. – PP. 76-93.

[2] Dubrovsky M. Justification of the Future as a Theological-Social Task // Reformation vs Revolution. Philosophical-Religious Notebook №2. – M., 2011. – C. 38-47.

and rich literary culture. But precisely in this moment of humility Protestants gain access to *another* future, a future which does not necessarily follow past experience, but arises from a simple trust in God and the difficult intellectual boldness to *begin* theology at the *end* of her tradition.

Therefore, finding itself in a situation of general intellectual weariness and disappointment in the opportunities offered by science, theology feels deeply its unique simplicity, and only through it can it reflect and continue its intellectual dialogue with postmodernity. **We intend to show that the simplicity inherent in Evangelical churches, and the astonishing, in light of this simplicity, intent on intellectual presence and witness in academic circles, call for the projection of a theological image of the future on the basis of the rediscovery of the Gospel and the justification of the University as the place for discussion of theology and her connection to the world.**

Now we must address the following question: **How can we develop theology with full intellectual responsibility, keeping in mind the disheartening fact that our rich traditions could lose their value?** This is a complex question, containing two simple and mutually exclusive questions, which have been asked before. How can we create our own tradition of theology for Evangelical churches, leaning on their simplicity? How can return to the reality of spiritual experience and simple trust in those, who are versed in theological knowledge and rich in its traditions?

Today theological-cultural forms, in which knowledge and experience were expressed and shared, have lost their value, therefore we are faced with the difficult question of their new connection—of theology retaining the immediacy of spiritual life with the highest responsibility for its intellectual expression. And this point in the history of theology could become a departing point for dialogue and the joint investigation of representatives of various traditions, including post-Soviet Evangelical Christians, who have traditionally kept their distance from such questions and those who ask them.

A common ground has emerged in discussions of the future of theology, not mediatory history, but early history, *beginning* history, from which it can project itself, and on the basis of which a system can be built. Methodological reconstruction, restoration, and reproduction of that which *was* given in history is replaced by a methodology of projecting that which *will be*; attempts at modeling, building on a foundation, *preconditions*.

The word *project* scares Evangelical Christians because it suggests taking responsibility for results and accountability; it arouses negative associations with active social ministry projects, a majority of which were interrupted because of irresponsibility and incompetence. But it is precisely the word ‘project’ which allows us to make a connection between the nature of life (“that’s how things turned out”) and the necessity of making an effort to perfect it (“we must”).

Where and how is the future projected? From the foundations of theology, as their new, more relevant, more promising reading. And also from without—

from outside sources, in which the image of a forming, developing world is more brightly presented. The first paradigm is the one most closely resembling the church, because she keeps her connection with the basics of the faith. The university is closer to the second, because it maintains the importance of the intellectual tradition and is capable of lengthening her life into the future, and again prove the connection between tradition and life.

In their theological projection, search for an adequate paradigm, and formation of a 'vision,' Evangelical churches can use internal and external resources. **An unlimited resource for the theological project is, first and foremost, Biblical teaching, the relevance of which is confirmed in every era with new strength, like a radical incongruity between the authenticity of the Gospel and established interpretative practices and traditions.**

The Gospel, which gave post-Soviet Evangelical churches their name, forces people to make a personal decision, a fate-determining choice. To choose one's own vision of the future is the right and responsibility of Christians and churches, in which they voluntarily unite. The theology of Evangelical churches must become an Evangelical theology based on the Gospel as its foundation, the foremost example of a Christian way of life, thinking, and service to the world.

One of the best places for non-Church theology is the *university*. It is a place of constant searching and boundary-pushing, and God is discussed there, even if it is in the context of argument with Him or a denouncement of Him. Acquiescing to be in the university and having the boldness to be tested by its wit, theology presents a relevant image of itself, projects its future in keeping with the spiritual-cultural development of the world.

For a majority of Protestants, theology is only possible within the Church. Theology in the university is bordering on free thinking and does not serve Church interests. But if the theology of Evangelical churches is an Evangelical theology, then it should be expressed not only in the Church, but in universities, and in any other gathering of people interested in out-of-the-box thinking. In the run-up to the anniversary of the Reformation, Protestants should remember that Luther was not only a monk and a preacher, but also a professor at Wittenberg University, and his predecessor Jan Hus was a master at Charles University in Prague.

In the pre-Soviet period there was a rich tradition of theological education, which gave life to both national enlightenment and secular education. In Soviet times the tradition was interrupted for a long period, but after independence and democratic reforms, a unique opportunity arose for previously persecuted churches to take advantage of religious freedom, and for dialogue between different Christian traditions. One of the main channels of intellectual interaction between churches and societies was education, because it gave churches the opportunity to take advantage of their significant social potential, and strengthen inter-confessional understanding and partnership.

Thereby *the university becomes a place for the projection of theology in its modern contextual form*, while university theology (theology expressed in an intellectual form, responding to the demands of modern university scholarship) can lead to the integration of the whole “summa theological” into the cultural life of society. Doubtlessly, the university itself, as the academic scientific institution of society, is becoming outdated in form and is in need of reformation. But despite this it remains a place where the search for meaning continues, within the desired limits of the field of theology, where discussion of the presence/absence of God and the ramifications thereof for the scientific picture of the world continues.

The University remains a crossroads, where history either intersects with the future, is discarded by the future, or is extended into the future. At the same time the Church remains the most conservative institution in society, and its development continues only through inertia. This is why, maintaining its connection with the Church, theology must not only testify in the university, but also find in it a living connection of times, movement, a dynamic of change, and challenges which provoke growth.

It is noteworthy that in the beginning of the twentieth century Russian and Ukrainian universities were home to a powerful and growing Christian student movement, headed by visible Evangelical Christians—Professor V. Martsinkovsky and Pastor P. Nikolai. Despite the declared “Christianity” of the movement, it was closer to the *university* than the church in its confessional expressions. Today the trend is returning—*university Christianity* that is inter- or even non-confessional, therefore theology within university boundaries will always differ from Church theology. And in this difference there is a danger as well as an advantage—the latter is fully possible, if the Church will simply stop avoiding dialogue with *university theologians*.

The Church becomes open to the university, seeing the sciences and scholarship as potential allies in reasonable thought and natural law. In this convergence there is not only the joy of freedom and openness, but also responsibility for the future in a general theoperspective.

«What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Or the Academy with the Church?» Tertullian’s question remains unresolved by post-Soviet Protestants. A number of different answers are offered, many of which are obviously unacceptable. “The Church must remain the Church,” say Church leaders. They do not deny the importance of education, but the status of the University is purposely denigrated. More often than not education is seen as subservient to the Church, not independent.

How can the positive aspects of education be used for the Church without weakening its identity? That is the way the problem is formulated by today’s pastors and professors.

After many decades of being underground, the Church has set itself the goal of demarginalization. Education is the main catalyst of change in life-style and thinking. In its absence private opinions or the collective uncon-

sciousness of “brotherhoods” will dominate. The need for education is recognized. But it is not under the control of the Church, and is not contained within its limits, and therefore it is seen as a risk for the established system and its leaders. Education transforms the system and even breaks it, opens it for real life and social changes. The system itself does not need such an effect; it needs reproduction of existing things. For the system education is an issue of image and legitimization. The presence of its own education system and educated people imparts a positive image to the Church in the eyes of society and legitimizes its claim for intellectual and moral authority. It is obvious that sooner or later such a “customized” characterization of education discredits the very idea of church-oriented education.

Beyond the limits of customized logic education becomes uncomfortable, but at the same time promoting and bringing closer to the intellectual centers. Protestant-style education is seen as being between the church and the university, in the realm of oncoming traffic, in the amplitude of oscillations, in the nuclear zone between these two spheres of influence.

Yet the Church is interested in one-way traffic, receiving from education an intellectual image and concrete applied knowledge. The University as a partnership of sciences is seen as a source of useful knowledge and ways of thinking and acting. It is popular to talk about using education for the Church. The influence of education on the Church, however, is seen as almost exclusively negative.

A long ladder could be extended from the Church to the University, but in reality it usually is cut off after only the first few steps, before reaching higher levels. Nevertheless, tying together these two beginnings, these two main entities of the educational sphere, and building bridges of communication and exchange between them is extremely important. For the University, connection with the Church restores the historical foundation of its own tradition, the superiority of the religio-cultural synthesis; it gives the opportunity of contact with its spiritual heritage, ultrarational knowledge, fundamental ethics, and a lively community of people interested in knowledge and meaning. For the Church that is important, in order to acquire useful knowledge about the outside world through its connection with the world of education, and a dynamic of internal change, as well as finding in education a means of being present, and a place and format for its testimony to thinkers, readers, and seekers.

If the Church does not overcome its self-centeredness, its education and its educated staff will fit only within the orbit of its attraction. Opening for the world in the missionary transformation movement, the Church meets not only Hollywood and McDonalds, in dialogue with which it subjects itself to an honest and serious trial, its faith becomes conscious, its internal life becomes dynamic, and its theology becomes scientifically adequate.

Without these interlocutors the Church is doomed to a lack of connection with the outside world: its better minds will argue with themselves, confer

doctorates on themselves and award themselves for their quixotic victories over heretics and atheists. Only a Church that needs the University is needed by the University.

Modernism is exhausted, but the Church and the University are still alienated one from another in a modernist way. Continuing to repeat mindlessly the crafty enlightenment words of the Council of People's Commisars on the separation of the Church from state and education, we doom both the Church and the University to unnecessary and needless confrontation. In fact, both the Church and the University may be considered fundamental in the educational sphere.

Understanding of the Church and the University in the tradition of post-Soviet Protestants is the one that set these two fundamentals apart from each other, considers them in different and non-intersecting ecclesiastical and secular planes. These separating approaches were formed in the context of isolation of the Church, which was ousted from social life. But today this alienation of the Church and the University still persists. Previously the Church could not be present in the University via its active representatives, and had even less effect on its atmosphere. Now the doors of the University are open, and instead of "You are not allowed," unwelcome visitors will instead be politely asked, "Who are you?", "What have you got?", and "What can you contribute to the University's life, its discussion, and destiny?"

And this is my key thesis: **The alienation between the Church and the University continues not because the University is closed or has an antichristian disposition, but because the Church cannot and does not even try to express its faith in forms suitable for the University and to put its faith to an intellectual test in discussions.** Thus, marginality of the Church covers and justifies the lack of readiness of church leadership to overcome it.

It might seem that the Soviet experience of marginalization has been eradicated for twenty years already, and that post-Soviet socialization of the Church is going on. But this socialization, i.e. inclusion of the Church in social life, is partial, deficient and fragmented even in the realm of program, to say nothing of practice. For example, everyone agrees to sit on councils and presidiums, to receive orders, land, buildings, and privileges. But is it interesting for the bishops to teach high school and university students, to write articles and textbooks, to be accountable to the intellectual society and to honestly answer difficult questions, to dive into the intricacies of educational models and scientific theories, to offer constructive theological corrections and critical remarks?

The current capacity of the Church in the area of education exceeds the level of readiness, capability and responsibility of its representatives. The University looks like a too complex environment and a too low profit project for the Church's mission and theological commissions. But it is here that the future is being created and the worldview of young people is being formed. Even if we speak the language of the omnipresent market, one cannot think

of a more justified investment than investment in education. Where does the Church invest today? Clearly not in education. It means that the Church loses the future, in the preparations for which it did not take part, and which will not meet its expectations.

The Church's influence on the University and the character of its relation to the world of self-education and science no longer depends on objective conditions, but first of all on the self-determination of the Church.

By now the objective basis of integration of the Church and the University into a common education area has been formed: it is a diversification of the educational system in post-Soviet society, legitimization of theology in the scientific and education environment, integration into the European and world education process. Education becomes internally pluralist by its ideology, methodology, and paradigmatics. Theology of the Church may be well-expressed in an adequate academic form and may occupy a rightful place in the structure of the University.

With all the obvious objective grounds in favor of integration, there are subjective arguments against uniting the Church and the University, which still remain strong, such as theological contradictions in the post-Soviet Protestants' philosophy of education, disproportions in the structure of church ministries, staff-related issues, and vestiges of a Soviet mindset its limiting influence on the educational initiatives of the Church.

Education on a wide scale and participation of the Church in the destiny of the University as one of its important trends open the way to de-marginalization of the Church in post-Soviet society, but encounter internal church opposition on the way. Unfortunately, post-Soviet proletarian complexes are working against Christian intellectuals in the Church, against their active role and against the very possibility of their existence.

At the same time both the Church and the University grow mature for the new, and are in search of an integrated philosophy of education. Instead of criticizing the University, the Church can offer it the spiritual education basis it is missing. Defense of the University is more important today than ever before. Destruction of the university culture of rationality will not promote the triumph of the Gospel truth.

The Christian University and Christians in the University are, respectively, the minimum and the maximum levels of connection for a Church which is open to the University as an interlocutor, a co-disputer, a co-worker in the formation of the intellectual culture of its members.

The University is not only a place of ministry, where Christians have to come and bring the truth they already know. The University is a place of true non-dogmatic life, a place of the birth of new ideas and concepts, of encounters and communication.

Both the Church and the University are the places of one's formation (in this sense not only the University but also the Church provides formation—formation of the way of thinking, of life and of personality)—and *reforma-*

tion. Formation of Christian intellectuals, who are sparse in the Church now, and who are so much needed for the defense of faith in the age of post-Christianity and new atheism, takes place both in the Church and the University in their common educational environment.

The continuing dispute of existing images, models, and traditions of the University and the Church makes us think about some other non-controversial images. And there we need not so much of the historical work of selection and sticking together the suitable and verified matter, as the theological work of formation of as-of-yet unseen and impossible way of relating between the Church and the University. The theological self-conception of the Church and theology of the University are the two trends that should converge.

The University shall be seen as a public place for testimony and discussions. The presence of the University requires audacious transition from theology of the Church to missiology in education. In a sense the Church does not have its own area—it is present everywhere, “in our midst,” including the University. The future of the Church is not attributed solely to the revival of Church liturgy, but also to the birth of the university liturgy. Here missiology beats new paths for ecclesiology. The Church in the University transforms into the Church of the University.

The relation with the University is important for the Church not just because the University is influential. It is quite possible that a post-Christian culture will become a post-university culture. At the “sunset” of meta-narrations dusk is growing everywhere. It is not solely the Church that loses its influence and needs the influential University. If the University dies, the Church will lose one of the main languages of culture, an important channel and a rational basis of communication with the real world. But the University needs the Church as well, as the power behind transformation, as a logos foundation, as a community of enthusiastic people. If the Christian roots of intellectual tradition are lost, the University in its recognizable forms will die.

Without the University there will be no one to teach and write theology. Without the Church, university science loses its seriousness and becomes a non-obliging game. Thus the Church and the University demonstrate in their development a predestined connection. That is how the ways of faith and reason converge in their successive progress.

In its expansion the Church runs against the boundaries of the University. To bypass the University’s walls and to focus on the easier missionary fields is to neglect the intellectuals as an audience not adequately reached and to neglect the intellect as a gift of God not adequately used.

Building up ties between the Church and the University, post-Soviet Protestants can form both the Church and academic theology, thus enriching the University and enriching themselves with the University.